AUBREY DE VERE AS A MAN OF LETTERS

DOOR

Th. A. PIJPERS

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DEKKER & VAN DE VEGT N.V., NIJMEGEN-UTRECHT

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PROMOTOR: Prof. Dr. A. POMPEN O.F.M.

N.V. CENTRALE DRUKKERIJ — NIJMEGEN

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ACADEMISCH PROEFSCHRIFT TER VERKRIJGING VAN DEN GRAAD VAN DOCTOR IN DE LETTEREN EN WIJSBEGEERTE AAN DE KATHOLIEKE UNIVERSITEIT VAN NIJMEGEN OP GEZAG VAN DEN WAARNEMENDEN RECTOR MAGNIFICUS Dr. TH. BAADER, HOOGLEERAAR IN DE FACULTEIT DER LETTEREN EN WIJSBEGEERTE VOLGENS BESLUIT VAN DEN SENAAT IN HET OPENBAAR TE VERDEDIGEN IN DE AULA DER UNIVERSITEIT OP DINSDAG 27 MEI 1941, DES NAMIDDAGS TE 3 UUR

DOOR

THEODORUS ADRIANUS PIJPERS
GEBOREN TE BREDA

DEKKER & VAN DE VEGT N.V., NIJMEGEN-UTRECHT

Gedrukt met steun
van de Katholieke Wetenschappelijke Vereeniging
en van het Dr. van Gils-fonds.

Aan mijn Vrouw
en
Kinderen

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INTRODUCTION

The only work in which the principal events of De Vere's life are recorded is Wilfrid Ward's *Aubrey de Vere, A Memoir,* published in 1904 (Longmans & Co, London; pp. X-416), two years after de Vere's death. It is based on the poet's unpublished diaries and on the letters which he himself had already collected with a view to publication when death overtook him. Ward did not aim at writing in the fullest sense a biography; the limit of time prescribed for its appearance in print made that impossible. His work was in the first place "an attempt at the exhibition of a remarkable mind and character, as displayed in his intercourse and his correspondence with his friends"; and in this design the biographer may be said to have fully succeeded.

Throughout the book Ward has proved himself a competent 'literary executor'. He had been acquainted with De Vere since about 1875 and of all De Vere's friends he, perhaps, knew best what were the main interests in his life. The poet's ideals, aspirations, friendships, and family relations are duly set forth in the book and are all illustrated by a number of letters, larger or smaller, in proportion as these interests were valued by De Vere himself. The subject of the poet's religious thoughts appealed to the biographer most. It is elaborately treated and especially in the chapter entitled 'Oxford, Cambridge, and Rome', the writer of *W. G. Ward and the Oxford Movement, The Life and Times of Cardinal Wiseman,* etc. etc., showed his predilection for religious subjects. Perhaps many readers will remain indifferent to the exposition of De Vere's religious faith, the analysis of which fills a large part of the *Memoir.* But Ward's account of De Vere's life is valuable in many other respects. Every student of the Victorian age will glow with kindly warmth over the pages of literary correspondence, reminiscence, and criticism of the leading men of the 19th century and will be thankful to the author not only for having given a clear picture of a true Victorian, but also for having contributed

valuable data to the study of De Vere's contemporaries.

In one respect, however, the *Memoir* was disappointing: Ward had confined himself mainly to his somewhat restricted materials and had done but scant justice to De Vere's literary works. He did not place him as a man of letters. This was an omission which the critic who reviewed Ward's *Memoir* in the American monthly, *The Nation* (November 3, 1904; vol. 79), deeply regretted. His impression was that Ward's book was "far less a memoir of Aubrey de Vere the poet than a memoir of Aubrey de Vere the Roman Catholic pietist". Wilfrid Meynell expressed the same opinion in *The Athenaeum* (October 1, 1904). Thinking of the scattered condition of De Vere's 'literary remains', such as his contributions to the biographies of Tennyson, Lord Houghton (Richard Monckton Milnes), Sara Coleridge, and others, this critic deplored that "Mr. Ward has made no attempt to gather the fragments", and he feared that "his determination not to attempt a biography based, with due proportion, on all available data, printed or unprinted, will awaken a regret the more keen inasmuch as the opportunity, once passed over, is hardly likely to present itself again". Probably Meynell was also thinking of the 'Obituary Notice' which had appeared from his own hand (signed W. M.) in the same monthly, four days after De Vere's death, in which case Ward's disregard of this article would explain the somewhat spiteful tone in which this part of the review was written. However this may be, Meynell's claim to be recognised in a book on Aubrey de Vere as a friend and as a critic was not unreasonable, for he had known him well, both as a man and as a writer.

Meynell's fears that after Ward's one-sided treatment De Vere's position as a man of letters might for a long time remain undefined were not wholly unfounded: up till the present day no attempt to deal with the poet on the lines suggested in *The Athenaeum* has been made. Although during his life his work had always had its admirers, De Vere had never been a fashion and towards the end of the 19th century the popular taste went in quite different directions. Three selections of his poetical works were brought out, two before his death, and one almost simultaneously with the publication of the *Memoir*, but even these attempts to awaken a wider interest in his works failed to secure him a large audience. After his death De Vere gradually sank into oblivion. Nowadays his works are remembered by only few Englishmen. In Holland, too, where M. A. P. C. Poelhekke introduced him to his countrymen as early as 1899, the number of

those who are to some extent acquainted with De Vere's poetry is comparatively small. Just as in England, his friends in this country must, it seems, be sought mainly in Catholic circles; outside these circles De Vere is generally little more than a name.

The result of this neglect is that De Vere as a man of letters is still imperfectly known. What the handbooks of English literature tell us about him amounts to a few generalities about his poetic power and to some remarks on his religious thoughtfulness, his following of Wordsworth, his prolixity, and his dignity of language, which is but scanty information about a poet whose poetical works equalled those of Tennyson in quantity and, as some of De Vere's admirers say, also in quality. Sometimes the inquiring student is positively misinformed. There are critics who want him to believe that De Vere's poetry is 'graceful'[1]), others tell him that De Vere was a mystic[2]), and a third group, again, affirms that De Vere's poetry "did much to help the Celtic Revival"[3]). No information could be more beside the truth. De Vere's faults and merits as a poet were mainly those of the Wordsworthian school, and the poetry of this 'school' is not characterized either by gracefulness or mysticism. As to his poetical temperament De Vere was almost as un-Irish as his master.

To this kind of misinformation also belong the errors frequently made by critics in trying to draw up a list of his works. De Vere is often mixed up with his father. A week after his death *The Daily Telegraph* started the confusion by attributing the elder poet's drama *Mary Tudor* to the son and from this newspaper the misstatement seems to have found its way into later notices of De Vere. The American critic G. N. Shuster[4]) made the same mistake in the three pages which he devoted to the poet, and so did the German critic J. Metzger[5]), who in dealing with De Vere apparently took Shuster for his guide. The critic Dobrée[6]) made quite a mess of it by mixing

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[1]) Cf. *Cambridge History of English Literature*, vol. XIII, ch. The Lesser Poets; p. 188.

[2]) Cf. Hugh Walker, *The Age of Tennyson*, 1921, 3rd ed. p. 261.

[3]) Cf. *Encyclopedia Britannica*, sub. De Vere.

[4]) G. N. Shuster, *The Catholic Spirit in modern English Literature*, 1922, New York, The Macmillan Company, p. 121 ff.

[5]) Joseph Metzger, *Das Katholische Schrifttum im heutigen England;* München, 1937; pp. 67-68.

[6]) Edith Batho and Bonamy Dobrée, *The Victorians and After;* 1830-1914. (Introductions to English Literature, ed. B. Dobrée; vol. IV), The Cresset Press, 1938. pp. 232-233.

them up and by adding some titles of his own invention to the list! A less serious inaccuracy occurs in an anthology of English writers much used at Catholic secondary schools in Holland[7]), in the tenth edition of which we see the section on Aubrey de Vere still headed by his father's name, Sir Aubrey de Vere, which mistake surprises us, for we know the editor to be a fervent admirer of Aubrey de Vere's poetry.

But, even if De Vere were fully dealt with as a poet, the picture of the man of letters would still be incomplete, for there is another aspect to his literary nature. He was also a critic, and his prose-writings are as essential a part of his literary works as his poetry. Nobody has ever analysed De Vere as a critic. In the handbooks of English literature his name is sought in vain under the head of 'Criticism in the 19th century'. And yet, his activities in this function extended over as many years as his poetic energies, that is to say, over about half a century, and at least one of his contemporaries, but one who was an eminent judge in literary matters, Richard Holt Hutton, declared that De Vere's literary essays were the more successful part of his writings.

De Vere does not deserve the neglect into which he has fallen, for he is an interesting and charming figure, both as a man and as an author. Hasty critics have classified him as one of 'the lesser poets', and this is the phrase which most handbooks have taken over; but we think that many lovers of poetry who read his works sympathetically will agree to the justness of this classification only after having remembered that, even among the lesser poets, there are degrees which come very near greatness. De Vere is generally considered the best among the Wordsworthians, and in our opinion he is a far better poet than, for instance, Matthew Arnold, whose poetry is often made so much of.

A special note of interest attaching to De Vere's works is that his long literary career covers the whole of that transitional period in the 19th century which is commonly called the Victorian Age. It is true that some critics have thought fit to speak of that time, and everything connected with it, in disparaging terms, but by the discerning student it is regarded as an era in English history of the utmost importance, as a time in which tremendous changes took place. The perplexing difficulties in religion, in politics, in industry, and in educ-

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[7]) H. Wismans, *A Literary Reader* (Alberts, Kerkrade; 10th ed. 1935).

ation, which the English, then living, had to face were problems that have not quite lost their actuality in our own days. This is one of the chief reasons why the generations of the twentieth century have come to take a keen interest in the lives and thoughts of "our Victorians". De Vere's writings derive much of their importance from the fact that several characteristics of that remarkable period are reflected in them. Because he was a convert to Catholicism, an Irishman, and a fighter for the moral and intellectual elevation of the people, his work places us in the midst of the four cardinal problems that presented themselves to his contemporaries and to him — namely, the storm in the Church of England, the struggle between England and Ireland, the progress of science, and the change in education. His critical writings more particularly are valuable because they carry us into the presence of the prominent men of his time, men such as Wordsworth, Newman, Manning, Tennyson, Browning, Patmore, Matthew Arnold, and Gladstone, with all of whom he discussed the subjects that were uppermost in his mind.

It is our purpose in the following pages to do justice to De Vere as a man of letters by dealing with him as a poet, as a critic, and as a man. We enter upon this task the more hopefully because we are convinced that such a work will be hailed by all admirers of De Vere as one which supplies a long-felt want; and we are confident that De Vere as a man of letters will be as much a surprise to every student who may be induced to read his works as he was to us on becoming acquainted with them.

CHRONOLOGICAL LIST
OF AUBREY DE VERE'S PUBLISHED WORKS

The Waldenses and other Poems	1842
The Search after Proserpine and other Poems	1843
English Misrule and Irish Misdeeds	1848
Picturesque Sketches of Greece and Turkey (2 vols.)	1850
Heroines of Charity	1854
Poems	1855
May Carols	1857
Select Specimens of English Poets	1858
The Sisters, Inisfail, and other Poems	1861
Inisfail, a lyrical Chronicle of Ireland	1863
The Infant Bridal and other Poems	1864
The Church Settlement of Ireland, or, Hibernia Pacanda	1866
The Church Establishment in Ireland	1867
Ireland's Church Property and the Right Use of it	1867
Pleas for Secularisation	1867
Ireland's Church Question	1868
Reply to certain Strictures by Miles O'Reilly	1868
The Legends of St. Patrick	1872
Alexander the Great	1874
St. Thomas of Canterbury	1876
The Infant Bridal (new and enlarged edition)	1876
The Fall of Rora, the Search after Proserpine, etc.	1877
Antar and Zara: an Eastern Romance. Inisfail, etc.	1877
Proteus and Amadeus: a Correspondence about National Theology	1878
Legends of the Saxon Saints	1879
May Carols (2nd ed. enlarged)	1881
The Characteristics of Spenser's Poetry	1882
The Foray of Queen Maeve and other Legends of Ireland's Heroic Age.	1882
Constitutional and Unconstitutional Political Action	1882
The Poetical Works of Aubrey de Vere (in 3 vols., Kegan Paul).	1884
Ireland and Proportional Representation	1885
Legends and Records of the Church and Empire	1887
Essays, chiefly on Poetry (2 vols.)	1887
St. Peter's Chains, or, Rome and the Italian Revolution; a series of Sonnets	1888

I. THE EVEN TENOR OF DE VERE'S LIFE

a. Parentage and Childhood

Aubrey de Vere — or Aubrey Thomas Hunt, as he was christened — was born at the family seat of the De Veres, Curragh Chase, in the county of Limerick (Ireland), on January 10, 1814. His father, Mr. Aubrey Hunt (afterwards Sir Aubrey de Vere), was a descendant of the De Veres who figured so gallantly in the days of Queen Elizabeth and whose ancestors had ever been true servants of the English sovereigns. King Stephen had, about 1150, conferred the title of Earl of Oxford upon the family, and, two centuries later, Robert de Vere was made Duke of Ireland by Richard II[1]). The De Veres held the dignity of the peerage until the year 1702, when the male line in England died out with the twentieth and last Earl of Oxford[2]). His picture is still in the library at Curragh Chase. The founder of the Irish branch of the family, and therefore the direct ancestor of the poet, was Aubrey Vere[3]), second son of the fifteenth Earl of Oxford and the grandfather of the twentieth. He was born about 1555. His daughter Jane married Mr. Henry Hunt of Gosfield, Essex, from whom the Irish family derived the name of Hunt. Jane Hunt's grandson, Vere Hunt, a Cromwellian officer, obtained from the Protector the estate 'Curragh', near the mouth of the Shannon, in Ireland, and

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[1]) T. F. Tout, *An Advanced History of Great Britain;* new ed., 1923, p. 232 (Longmans, Green & Co. London). Cp. also: Macaulay, *The History of England from the Accession of James* II; vol. II, p. 105 (Every Man's Library, J. M. Dent & Sons, London).

[2]) Evelyn's Diary, vol. 1, p. 380 (Every Man's Library). Pepys's Diary, vol. 1, pp. 95, 267 (Every Man's Library). Cp. also: Keith Feiling, *History of the Tory Party,* pp. 218, 232. (Clarendon Press Oxford, 1924).

[3]) Historians usually call the family De Vere; Shakespeare speaks of Lord Aubrey Vere (H6CIII, 3); the name 'Vere' seems to be the most usual form until our poet's time.

settled there in 1657[4]). The property was part of the lands which Cromwell had confiscated in Munster and which he gave to his veterans, on condition that they should exercise English authority over the native population of their district.

The last member of the family to bear the name of Hunt until his death was Aubrey's grandfather, Sir Vere Hunt of Curragh, who married the Earl of Limerick's daughter and was created baronet on December 4, 1784. He is described in the poet's *Recollections* as an adventurous, impulsive, free-spoken man, who lived much outside Ireland, but who, none the less, was very popular with his tenants because of his love for the poor. He cared little for money, and under his management the family property dwindled away to half its size. Aubrey tells us that he lost about £ 15.000 by cards before he renounced them. One of his impulsive acts was to buy the isle of Lundy (in the Bristol Channel), which one day was set up for auction. He knew nothing whatever about the property, but when the auctioneer declared that it had never paid either tax or tithe, that it acknowledged neither King nor Parliament, he made a bid, and the island was knocked down to him. Another illustration of his impulsive character is that during the Napoleonic wars he raised two regiments from the population in the neighbourhood of Curragh and made his only son, then still a boy, a captain in one of them. Nor was he very keen on a higher title. He was informed that the patent for his peerage, an English one, was ready, but at the last moment he changed his mind and declined the offer.

On Sir Vere Hunt's death, in 1818, the baronetcy of Curragh was inherited by Aubrey's father, who on the 15th of March, 1832[5]), obtained permission by royal licence to change the family name into that of De Vere, so that henceforth the youthful Aubrey Thomas Hunt was called Aubrey de Vere. At the age of eighteen Sir Aubrey (born on August 28, 1788) had married Mary, eldest daughter of Stephen Edward Rice of Mount Trenchard (co. Limerick), and sister to the first Lord Monteagle. The bride was then only seventeen. They had eight children, of whom Aubrey was the third. The two eldest sons, Vere and Stephen, successively inherited the estate and, as Stephen,

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[4]) *Dictionary of National Biography*, sub. De Vere.

[5]) In Ward's *Memoir* given as 1831 (p. 3). Ward writes: "In 1831, shortly after Sir Aubrey's accession to the baronetcy ...."; this is misleading: there was a space of 14 years between this accession and the year 1832 (See Dict. of Nat. Bio.).

who survived all the members of the family, died a bachelor — his brothers either remained unmarried or died without male issue — the male line of the Irish De Veres expired on his death [6]). Aubrey had three sisters, of whom two died at an early age. His two younger brothers, an engineer in the army and a sailor, fought in the Crimean war and got safely through it, but neither of them lived long after the year of peace. The youngest, the engineer, whose names were Horace and Francis, in honour of the two "Fighting Veres" of Queen Elizabeth's time [7]), was murdered by one of his subordinates.

Sir Aubrey was a man of deeply religious principles. He was a faithful member of the High Church, and he fostered in his offspring the same veneration for the creed of his Irish ancestors. But his strong personal conviction did not in any way render him intolerant of the Catholic religion of his tenants. He always taught his children to respect the belief of others, and he practised his teaching of tolerance himself by taking a sympathetic interest in the weal and woe of his farmers and by improving their condition as much as he could. His constant regard for their welfare made him beloved as a landlord, and all his family shared in the esteem. In manners and in culture he was an Englishman. At the age of ten he had been placed at the village of Ambleside (Cumberland), under the care of a private tutor, the Rev. John Dawes, and he had received his school education at Harrow where he was the contemporary of Lord Byron, and of Sir Robert Peel [8]). This early stay in England, together with the consciousness that he was connected with England by bonds of religion and of remote ancestry, had inspired into Sir Aubrey a deep love for the land of his forefathers. But with this patriotic feeling was mingled a love for Ireland hardly less strong. He was a Unionist, who regarded England and Ireland as one empire. His touching poem *Lamentation of Ireland* bears sufficient testimony to his love for his native country. Save for a few trips made to England he spent all his life in Ireland. It was the land of his birth, of his marriage, and of his death, just

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[6]) Stephen died in 1904. In 1933 the female branch of the family was represented by Robert O'Brien Vere de Vere (barrister), Chief Justice of Grenada, etc. Curragh Chase (see *Who's Who*, 1933).

[7]) Sir Horace Vere and his force of English volunteers fought for the liberty of the Palatinate in the army of its Elector, in 1620 (see Green, *A Short History of the English People*, vol. 2, p. 458; Every Man's Library).

[8]) Memoir to the edition of *Mary Tudor*, p. XI; *Recollections*, p. 36, and p. 126.

as it was the native land of all his family, the nuptial ground of two of his children, and the burial place of all its members. Sir Aubrey loved Ireland for its sacred memories, for its great historical past, and for the impressive beauty of its natural scenery. But Curragh Chase was his greatest pride.

Curragh Chase, as the residence of the family was called after 1832, is situated south of the Shannon, between its two tributaries, the Maigue and the Deel. To-day it can best be reached by the railway-line which runs from Limerick to Adare and Ballingrane Junction. Adare, to the south of the estate, is the nearest station. The surrounding country is a vast, undulating plain of pastures and moorland, sparsely wooded, and with only a few knolls. Eight miles to the south of Adare lies Knockfierna, a hill of eight hundred feet high, from which the eye surveys a landscape of green, and brown, and purple in all directions, intersected by winding streams — an extensive view, though, like many Irish inland views, somewhat dreary, on account of the comparative absence of trees. But, if the rural scenery of county Limerick is less impressive to the eye than, for instance, the wild beauty of the extreme southwest of the island, with its mountains and lakes, it is far more interesting to the contemplative mind of the tourist in another respect. The Shannon valley abounds with places and ruins that remind the traveller of Ireland's long struggle against invaders and of its conversion. There is the town of Limerick, with its modern part and its old-Irish quarter, sometime the scene of many a bloody siege; a few miles to the west of it lies the village of St. Patrickswell, with its name suggestive of the exploits of Ireland's great apostle; farther inland, "Shanid", an old ruined keep of the Desmond race, crowns the top of a high hill; and quite close to Curragh Chase lies the ancient village of Adare. This little town saw many a battle and was more than once burned down. But it is famous chiefly for the venerable ruins of a castle which belonged to the Kildares, and for the number of its monastic institutions, still represented by the ruins of a Franciscan convent, as well as by one of the Trinitarian and one of the Augustinian order, the churches of which have been restored, one for Catholic and the other for Protestant worship. The Knights Templars once possessed a house at Adare; but its site cannot now be ascertained. The proprietors of the place, the Earls of Dunraven, have done much to restore part of its ancient beauty. In this district Curragh Chase has a charm of its own; for not only can it boast a beautiful manor, but it is also

surrounded by a 'park' which is hilly and wooded. In the early part of the 19th century, however, it was not as it is now. When Aubrey in his old age recalled to his mind the picture of the estate as he had seen it in his youth, he described it as follows: "At the bottom of the lawn there now spreads a lake, but at that time it was rich meadow land, divided by a slender stream, with fair green hills beyond. The pleasure ground now blends insensibly with the lawns and woods; but it had then a wall around it, which, as my father's old friend and schoolfellow, the then Sir Thomas Acland, said on visiting us, when both had left youth behind, gave it a look of monastic seclusion. It was then divided into four grassy spaces, as smooth as velvet, and bright with many a flower-bed. I can still see the deer park, and the deer bounding from brake to brake of low-spreading oak and birch; the gathering of the poor on Sunday evenings at the gates of the long ash avenue for their rural dance; and the gay, though half bashful, confidence with which some rosy peasant girl would advance, and drop a court'sy before one of our party, or some visitor at the "big house", that court'sy being an invitation to dance" [9]). Aubrey also gave us some idea of the size of the property by stating that one of its approaches was three miles long, and that his grandmother used to drive about the park with her four greys and an outrider.

In this beautiful home the greater part of Aubrey's boyhood was spent. Its pleasant grounds were like a paradise to the young lad, who loved to wander about the woods and the hills after the lessons of his tutor were finished. In the wilder parts of "this portion of ancient Ireland's forest primeval" he would sit for hours dreaming and giving full rein to his boyish fantasies. One of the numerous delightful spots in the park, the Cave Walk, so called after a hollow which penetrated deep into the rocks, had a particular charm for him; he often went into it, merely "to enjoy, on reascending and approaching its mouth, the embalmed and delicious air into which the breath of unnumbered flowers and leaves and streams, seen or invisible, had been melted down. One felt as if life required nothing more for its satisfaction than the quiet breathing of such air —, a healing bath to body and spirit alike" [10]). This was his first experience of that mysterious power which in Wordsworth had roused a deep veneration for Nature, born of his conviction that man's only

[9]) *Recollections*, p. 1-2.
[10]) *Recollections*, p. 35.

and true happiness was to be found in the apprehension of her self-revelation. De Vere, too, felt that power. Throughout his life he derived from the scene of his youth the same happiness as Wordsworth enjoyed in the Lake District. Boyish pleasures such as visiting the Cave Walk, his occupation in the garden, in which he had a little territory of his own, and the nightly reveries on the lake in which he indulged when the years of his childhood were past, prove that already at an early age he underwent — although unconsciously, perhaps — the salutary influence which Nature exercises on a susceptible heart. The natural scenery round about Curragh Chase formed his little world of joy, of peace, and of liberty, and some of his best poems owed their inspiration to the pleasures which this little world afforded him. When, in later life, he described his impressions of dying Nature in his magnificent poem *Autumnal Ode,* the park of Curragh Chase was the actual scene of his ramble through the fields and the woods, just as it was the early appearance of the daffodil on the lawn in front of the manor that made him hail this flower in his equally beautiful *Ode to the Daffodil.*

Aubrey was seven years old when the whole family went to stay for some months at Mount Trenchard, the residence of his maternal grandmother, on the southern bank of the Shannon. Here the boy spent many a pleasant day in the company of his brothers and of his cousin, sailing in a little open boat, now by the woody shores of Cahircon, now among the islands at the mouth of the Fergus, now beneath the heathy hills that overhang Foynes. Sometimes trips were made far inland, or down the river, past Tarbert and Kilrush, till the high cliffs of Ballybunion came in sight. It was on such occasions that Aubrey for the first time visited Knock Patrick, from which mountain St. Patrick was said to have blessed Ireland; the isle of Scattery, which in olden times had been the lonely hermitage of St. Senan; and many more places that reminded him of the greatness of old Ireland. Sir Aubrey did not forget to point out to his children the historical significance of these spots!

In the next summer the family went to England where they remained for two years. They took up their residence successively in London, at Richmond Hill, and at Ruxley, near the village of Esher, and made various excursions in the Thames valley. Aubrey greatly enjoyed this long stay in England. His imagination was set working when he daily watched the sunsets from Richmond Terrace, near the "Star and Garter", when he strolled through the palatial gardens of

Hampton Court, or when he saw Ham House, which venerable mansion he connected with a German fairy tale about "a witch whose delight was to entice young lovers into her forest, then change them into birds, and hang them up in the cages that lined the corridors of her palace prison"; and it characterizes the sensitiveness of his young mind that in his maturer life he used to revisit every year the spots where at the age of eight he had flown kites and played cricket, or where he had walked with his parents. One black shadow, however, had crept over the happiness of his sojourn in England: it was here that he was entrusted to the care of his first governess, a perfectly-mannered Frenchwoman, whose sister had married a brother of the Emperor Napoleon. She taught him the art of writing, but young Aubrey realised that with her coming part of his freedom had gone and that he had now entered the second stage of his youth.

After the return of the family to Ireland home life at Curragh Chase continued the even tenor of its way. Some four or five years passed away in the quiet routine of studies in the morning, and a long walk in the afternoon, or sometimes a ride, for each of the boys boasted a horse; and when Christmas time came the De Veres paid their usual visit to Adare Manor, which was the greatest event of the year. In the following sonnet, *The Family Picture,* Sir Aubrey gives a description of the domestic peace, the love and the happiness among the members of the ever-increasing family, a picture which by its characterisation of simplicity and humbleness in the parents makes us forget for a moment that the writer of the sonnet was a descendant of the proud race of the Earls of Oxford:

> With work in hand, perchance some fairy cap
> To deck the little stranger yet to come;
> One rosy boy struggling to mount her lap,
> The eldest studious, with a book or map;
> Her timid girl beside, with a faint bloom,
> Conning some tale; while with no gentle tap
> Yon chubby urchin beats his mimic drum,
> Nor heeds the doubtful frown her eyes assume.
> So sits the mother! with her fondest smile
> Regarding her sweet Little-Ones the while;
> And he, the happy man! to whom belong
> These treasures, feels their living charm beguile
> All mortal cares; and eyes the prattling throng
> With rapture-rising heart, and a thanksgiving tongue.

b. Formation and Education

Of the studies which Aubrey pursued with a tutor, the classical languages and mathematics did not appeal very strongly to him. His impression of Latin poetry in particular was far from favourable. "Indeed, I think very little of Latin poetry. It was an imitative, not a creative art", he wrote to his friend, Sir William Rowan Hamilton, shortly before he went to the university. All the greater, however, was his interest in English poetry. The first stimulus to it he had received from his first teacher, William St. George Pellissier, a descendant of an exiled family of Huguenots. This French aristocrat, whose appearance filled him with awe and whose extensive knowledge of the classical as well as the modern poets and theologians roused his deep admiration, was a magnificent dramatic reader, and it filled Aubrey with an intense delight to hear him read out Shakespeare's dramas in the domestic circle. The magnificence of these readings lingered in his memory to the end of his life and after three quarters of a century he looked back upon them as "the most stimulative part of my education".

As regards his intellectual education Aubrey was fortune's favourite. All the external factors were there to develop rapidly the talents that were slumbering in him. Not only was it the principal care of his parents that during the hours of study their children should receive a moral and scientific education which could be put on a par with that of the best aristocratic families in England, but also the recreation of the children was for the greater part combined with instruction. In their leisure hours sometimes a speech of Brougham's, Plunket's, or Canning's was read aloud, and when left to themselves they were allowed to read some biographical work, a volume of poetry, or a book of travel, seldom a novel, except when Walter Scott "had brightened all the households in the land with another of his delightful romances". But the evenings at Curragh Chase became even more instructive for young Aubrey when a few years later his two elder brothers came home from Cambridge for the holidays and told of the new ideas and the knowledge they had picked up there. Sometimes the circle round the domestic hearth grew, when friends, such as young Lord Adare, the future writer of *Memorials of Adare*, Stephen Spring Rice, Aubrey's maternal cousin, and Sir William Rowan Hamilton, Professor of Mathematics at Trinity College, Dublin, were present. Then discussions often arose about budding celebrities in the student

world, as for instance, Julius Hare, the great friend of Walter Savage Landor, Connop Thirlwall, afterwards Bishop of St. David's, John Sterling, the founder of the Sterling Club in 1838, and Frederick Denison Maurice, the originator of the movement known as Christian Socialism; or they held disputations about theology and literature, trying to show off their progress in the study of these subjects. Especially literature was discussed, for the head of the family was a great lover of English poetry. He entertained a profound admiration for Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Sir Walter Scott, S. T. Coleridge, Keats, and Shelley; and it happened more than once, Aubrey says in his *Recollections,* that the youths revised their judgment of a certain poet under the influence of Sir Aubrey's divergent opinion of him. So, for instance, Aubrey, whose belief in Byron's greatness was severely shaken by his father's verdict that Wordsworth was a better poet. Wordsworth's work particularly constituted a favourite topic. For Wordsworth Sir Aubrey cherished an unbounded admiration. This veneration had proceeded partly from the correspondence of their sympathies in matters of morality and literature, but the bond of friendship between them contributed to it no less. Sir Aubrey had made Wordsworth's acquaintance when, in 1833, he revisited Ambleside, the village in the Lake District where he had been sent as a boy for his education. Like Wordsworth, Sir Aubrey, too, had come under the spell of the beautiful country, and when Wordsworth's poems recalled to his mind the scenes of his boyhood, he was among the first and most enthusiastic of his admirers. It was also chiefly under the influence of Wordsworth that he himself began to write poetry, at first largely dramatic poetry, as *Julian the Apostate* and *The Duke of Mercia,* both published during the stay of the family in England (1822-1823), but later on shorter poems, which he published in 1842 under the title of *A Song of Faith.* The love of poetry grew also in the hearts of the younger De Veres. Stephen, whose literary career began about the same time as Aubrey's, became a poet of distinction in his later years and is now best known as a translator of Horace's *Odes.* Even Aubrey's mother occasionally wrote poems, and the four sonnets from her hand, inserted in Sir Aubrey's volume (signed M.), testify to a feeling and taste for poetry delicate enough to awaken a regret that she so seldom used her poetic gift.

Growing up in a family whose members all felt a deep veneration for poetry, studying under the guidance of a talented Shakespeare student from the first years that his awakening soul opened to the

impressions of the world's life, surrounded by the austere splendour of Irish natural scenery and an undisturbed domestic happiness, Aubrey could not fail to be impressed with the beauty of literature, and was bound to develop a fine taste for it very soon. For a short time he fell a victim to the fashion of the moment. "No poet was then popular except Byron" (Recoll. p. 16). So it happened that for reading-matter in his leisure hours his first choice fell on Byron, whose flashy poetry, with its quasi-heroism, its quasi-contempt for the world, its sentimentalism and its rhetoric, contained the very elements to capture the susceptible heart and imaginative mind of a seventeen-year old boy. Browning and Tennyson had been enthralled in the same way. The influence of Byron's poetry soon made itself felt and, as Aubrey himself attests, "the Byronic sulk" did not remain unnoticed by those around him. The enchantment, however, did not last long, and he cast Byron from him "as a vicious young horse throws off a bad rider" (Recoll. p. 199). This early change was owing to his father's opinion about Byron, and especially to his becoming acquainted with Wordsworth's and Shelley's poetry. In England the work of the latter poet was fairly unknown to the general public until about 1840, when through the efforts of the "Apostles' Club" at Cambridge the first complete edition of his poems saw the light. It was a memorable day in Aubrey's life when his tutor, Edward Johnstone, read with him Wordsworth's *Vernal Ode* and introduced him into the realm of beauty which this poet had disclosed at the height of his poetic powers. Johnstone, a religious man who afterwards took orders, was an ardent admirer of the 'Romanticists' and had already written a discriminating criticism of Shelley's poems[11]). It was in the poetry of these men that Aubrey found what had become so dear to him in his life at Curragh Chase: liberty, dreaming, the splendour of Nature, the joyful contact with the beautiful. Till then his youth had been a poem in itself, and the new world which the *Vernal Ode* had opened up to him seemed to be the continuation of it. From that moment Wordsworth's poems constituted his book of life, in which he found embodied the thoughts and feelings that had ever stirred his young poetic soul. He also read with keen enjoyment the works of other poets, such as Coleridge, Keats, Scott, Landor, Burns, and Leigh Hunt, for they all expressed to a different degree his ideal of poetry. In their work his conception of beauty was realized. In the first moments of his enthusiasm he had thought

[11]) *Recollections*, p. 60.

that Byron had transported him into the same world of freedom and of true poetic imagination, but after having been enlightened by his tutor Johnstone he began to see that the power which until then had captivated him did not originate in poetry. In his later life he used to contrast the real poetic qualities of the masterpieces of Wordsworth and Shelley with the specious fireworks of Byron, "who must have deprived the world of as much poetry as he ever produced" (Recoll. p. 16).

The effect on him of such poems as the *Vernal Ode, Laodamia,* and *Ode to a Skylark* was immediate. It was a joyful surrender with heart and soul to the art of poetry, which from that moment became his all in all. During many hours of the day he was engrossed in it, he lived and worked in it. He was prepared to sacrifice a great deal to poetry; he gave up the career of a clergyman, for which his father had destined him and which he himself had at first thought quite congenial. He would probably also have neglected his academic studies for it, if he could not have combined them with his poetic pursuits. How easily the boy of seventeen moved already in this poetical world and how keen his insight was at that age to distinguish real greatness from the merely mediocre, may appear from a passage in the letter which he wrote to Sir William Rowan Hamilton on May 20, 1831, with reference to the latter's visit to S. T. Coleridge: "You ought to write a poem entitled 'Coleridge Visited' and then let me see it. Were the waters clear enough to let you see the weeds at the bottom? Above all, while you stood on the bank, could you hear the inner voice from beneath the superficial eddies? You know Tennyson's exquisite line: "With an inner voice the river ran". I think every great man has this under-current of thought, peculiarly his own, continually flowing forward with a grave and perfect harmony; it is what characterizes him, what separates him from other great men" [12]). What Hamilton left undone De Vere performed in one of his first poems and we find in his ode *Coleridge* "that inner voice which flows beneath the outer", as a parallel to Tennyson's line in *The Dying Swan.* This letter to Hamilton is not only an instance of the boy's precocity, but it also foreshadows De Vere's literary career as a poet and a critic.

He was not over-keen to go to the university. Ambition in any form was foreign to his nature and the prospect of having to struggle a second time through Latin verse, as he had done with his tutors, was anything but attractive to him. The day before he went to Dublin

[12]) *Memoir,* p. 8.

he wrote to Sir William Rowan Hamilton: "As for my university course I really care very little about that at present.... I have been so long engaged in studying English poetry and metaphysics, together with the more advanced classics, that I think the effort and sacrifice of time would not be at all repaid by the remote chance of getting high honours. I have a particular dislike to almost all the university course" [13]). But not to literature! Especially poetry had his increased interest. The university imparted to him a deepening and widening of knowledge in general, but at the same time an intenser enjoyment of poetry. More than ever he felt drawn to his favourite poets Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Keats, Landor, to which body of great men he now added rising celebrities such as Browning, Arthur Hallam, Henry Taylor, and Tennyson. To read, to discuss, and to meditate on their works was henceforward his chief recreation. It was also in the first year of his stay at Dublin that he began to write poetry himself.

Luck was with him a second time when during his years of study at Dublin he had the support of his great friend Sir William Rowan Hamilton [14]). The latter was a graduate of Trinity College, where in his college days he had won nearly all the prizes that were awarded for the sciences and for the languages. Before his twenty-seventh year he was Professor of Mathematics and Astronomy in the same university. He was nine years older than Aubrey and had made his acquaintance at Adare in September, 1831. During his stay at Curragh Chase he had also made the acquaintance of Ellen, Aubrey's sister, to whom from the first he formed a strong attachment. His love was not returned, but this disappointment did not affect the friendship once contracted with Aubrey. It is not impossible that Hamilton's position at Dublin was one of the reasons why Aubrey was sent there instead of to Cambridge or Oxford; and also Aubrey's statement that Sir William approved of his father's intention to choose the Church as a career for his son, seems to point to the fact that they had conferred about the matter. At any rate, Aubrey would have lost much if he had not had the benefit of Hamilton's learning and views. He had always wished eagerly to come into personal contact with S. T. Coleridge, the poet-philosopher at Highgate, who for years had been the oracle of the students of metaphysics; but now that after 1832 this hope was not likely to be realized, because "the rapt one of the

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[13]) *Memoir*, p. 11.

[14]) Not to be confounded with the Scottish philosopher, Sir William Hamilton (1788-1856).

godlike forehead" (Wordsworth's poetical description of Coleridge) in the last few years of his life was suffering from a lingering disease, he deemed the intercourse with Hamilton the best compensation for this disappointment. He often visited the scholar in his observatory and discussed with him poetry, theology, and philosophy, which subjects gave him ample opportunity of comparing his own mental faculties with the genius of "the great embodied intellect", as he called Hamilton. These conversations possessed a great formative value for him. They taught him to rely on his own judgment, they sharpened his discernment in the study of theological and philosophical works, and contributed much to the awakening in him of those talents for criticism which marked his writings from the beginning. When after the completion of his scientific education he returned from Dublin in 1837 he was in a position to devote himself strenuously to the work for which, he thought, Providence had destined him. During these years he was in two minds about taking orders, but of one thing he was certain, namely, that his life should be dedicated to God and the Faith. Priest or poet, in one respect it made no difference to him. In his eyes it was the task of poets, as much as of priests, to bring Man to God. In his sonnet *Beatific Vision of the Earth* he called the poets "the choir of God's great Church below", and a similar thought underlies the sonnet *The Poetic Function,* in which he complained that in his time the poets had to perform that task all by themselves, because many priests were deficient in their duties. He felt that his mission consisted in fighting the spreading unbelief and the spirit of liberalism in the Anglican Church. He ardently grappled with this evil of his time and few poets ever put their efforts at the service of the Faith with more conviction and perseverance.

Before settling down to the uneventful life of an unmarried country gentleman De Vere spent some years in travel. After the downfall of Napoleon it had become once more a general practice with the families of the better classes in England to send or take their sons who had recently left the university on a tour to the continent, and Sir Aubrey, whose views on the point of education were thoroughly English, decided that his son, after his return from Dublin, should also see a little more of the world. Since his childhood Aubrey had never been out of Ireland. In 1834 his only surviving sister, Ellen, who in that year was married to Robert O'Brien, the fourth son of Sir Edward O'Brien, of Dromoland, had removed to the residence of her husband's family in the county of Clare, across the Shannon, and

at this seat Aubrey had always been a welcome guest during his vacations. After one of these stays at Dromoland he had also been taken for some weeks to Miltown Malbay, a little town on the Atlantic coast, the strengthening breezes of which were thought likely to benefit his mother's health. But, however much he enjoyed the forlorn beauty of the county Clare, his rides among the craggy hills of Thomond, and his visits to the country seats of the neighbouring gentry, these trips did not satisfy his longings. It had long been his ideal to see the south and the east of Europe, the old world.

In December 1838 he started on his first long journey, alone. On his way to the continent he stayed at Oxford, London, and Cambridge, spending a week in each of these towns to visit places of interest and make the acquaintance of Newman, Henry Taylor, James Spedding, and other great men to whom his relations in Ireland and in England could introduce him. Early in the year 1839 he crossed to France and, travelling at his ease, made his way to Switzerland and Italy, reaching Rome in April. Before his departure a cousin of his, a soldier, who had just returned from the south, had told him that, if he looked sharp, he need not spend more on his journey than a hundred pounds a month, but on two occasions Aubrey's economy to make excursions in the mountains without a guide nearly cost him his life. He got into serious trouble when he recklessly tried to go on foot from Brienz to Interlaken at night by an unfrequented mountain-path, and on another perilous climb he was caught by a violent snowstorm while crossing a high pass. Aubrey disliked guides, first because they were too expensive, and secondly because "they have their own notions as to the paths which orthodox travellers should take". He hated any interference with his freedom when wandering among the mountains.

Rome made a mighty impression on him. In the many letters which he sent to his parents and to his sister during his three months' stay here, he gave enthusiastic accounts of his daily experiences in the great city, of the parties he attended, and of the new friends he made. But by far the greater portion of his correspondence was devoted to a description of the intense Catholic life round about him and of the impression it made on him. On his tour through France and northern Italy he had already evinced a particular interest in churches and other places of worship, but in Rome his eagerness to visit cathedrals, convents, seminaries, and monasteries, was very striking indeed. It was his favourite occupation to examine the interior of such

buildings, and whenever he had an opportunity of attending a typical Catholic ceremony, he was determined not to miss it. He watched the ceremony of nuns taking the veil, he saw the Pope give his benediction from the balcony of St. Peter's and he went as many as three times to the Pope's Chapel to hear the 'Miserere'. Of course, De Vere's interest in these Catholic institutions and services was merely that of the sight-seer. Like any Anglican he dreaded the Roman Church, with her "anti-national tendencies", her "unbounded ambition", and her "priestly power", which in his eyes was "the most complete and complicated *imperium in imperio* that ever was invented" (*Memoir*, p. 43); and yet, he felt himself attracted by her universality, her organization, and her discipline, as if by a hidden spell. In several of the poems which he wrote at that time his fear of the Latin Church is blended with the vague feeling that, if ever the Apostolic Church were to come back to earth, Rome would be the seat of it.

After having visited Greece and Constantinople De Vere returned to Curragh Chase about midsummer, in 1840. But the old world drew him and not many years elapsed before he went to the south again. In November, 1843, Henry Taylor and his wife invited him to accompany them on a tour through Italy, which invitation he eagerly accepted. He spent there nine months with them. During the interval of three years between these two journeys De Vere had stayed alternately in Ireland and in England. In the spring of 1841 he had made an excursion to Cumberland, and this was the first of that series of annual visits to England which so typically illustrates the equal division of his affections between the two countries. Every year, from 1841 onwards, he passed the summertime in England and usually took up his abode in London, from which headquarters he regularly went on his round to see his friends at Oxford, Cambridge, Rydal Mount, or to whatever part of the country they had removed. This habit he kept up till his old age.

Early in July, 1846, while staying in London, De Vere was urgently called back to Curragh Chase where his father lay dangerously ill. He hurried home and was just in time to receive his father's last blessing. For a long time already Sir Aubrey's poor health had been a source of constant alarm to the inmates of Curragh Chase. Since 1844 he had been troubled by frequent attacks of excruciating pain, which had twice made an operation necessary. These treatments had given him temporary relief so that, in 1845, he could even accompany his son on a trip to the Lake District. But the disease was incurable

and his days were numbered. He died on the 5th of July, 1846[15]. His death was a heavy blow to Aubrey, who lost in him a dearly beloved and loving father. With Sir Aubrey something essential to the place seemed to have been taken away and, although life at Curragh Chase remained almost exactly what it had been before, the old atmosphere of warmth and oneness had somehow changed. Before Sir Aubrey's death each of the children had been dependent on his parents for anything he chose to do, but with Vere's accession to the baronetcy Stephen, Aubrey, and the two younger brothers had become independent members of the family, each with a small income of his own. Very soon the changed atmosphere manifested itself to Aubrey in a more palpable form: within two years of their father's death Vere and Stephen showed their dissatisfaction with the Anglican Church and became Catholics.

c. Conversion

The story of Aubrey de Vere's life centres round the one important event in it, his transition from Anglicanism to Catholicism. His conversion is the milestone on that road of eighty-eight years' length, the monotony of which is, for the rest, only broken by travels to England or to the continent, by the publication of a volume of poems or a prose work, and by the loss or the acquisition of a friend. The crisis in his thirty-seventh year seems, as it were, the inevitable result of all his reflections and labours in the period prior to 1851, in social as well as in literary fields, and it is not difficult to recognise in the step which he took in 1851 the source and the starting-point of all his subsequent thinking and writing. In a sense the Catholic period is the calm continuation of his Anglican period, but still, his conversion brought about some important changes, especially in those interests which, after the Faith, were dearest to him, namely, his literary work and the relations between him and his friends.

A change of religious conviction is at all times an important event in the spiritual life of a serious-minded man. It is a step which is taken only after many moments of doubt and anxiety, and which is not easily undone. Instances of converts to Catholicism who regretted

[15]) In his *Recollections* (p. 211) and in his Memoir to *Mary Tudor* De Vere gives the 28th of July as the date. We think, however, that on this point his letters are more reliable than his memory. (See Ward's *Memoir*, p. 110 ff.).

their step and ultimately came back again to the old creed are comparatively rare. All converts who are allowed to give their own version of the process in their souls, a method which is applied in Maurice Leahy's instructive book, *Conversions to the Catholic Church* (Burns, Oates, and Washbourne; London, 1933), lay particular stress on the irrevocability of their deed and try to emphasize this quality of it by using expressions and images like: 'the unconditional submission of the will to the will of God', 'to burn one's boats and take the plunge', 'the crossing of the bridge', 'the stepping out of a small boat on to an Atlantic liner', and the like. The irrevocability of their deed is perhaps even more deterrent to all of them than all the doubts and misgivings during the time of their search for truth[16]).

Several non-Catholic psychologists of modern times have tried to explain away a conversion as an undertaking which testifies to weakness of character and which is, therefore, unworthy of man. Their methods of investigation are not the same at all points and their conclusions are not always so hazardous as, for instance, Geoffrey Faber's, who in his book *Oxford-Apostles* (1933) tests some traits of character and utterances of each of his 'patients' by the laws of modern science, and who stigmatizes the 'Newmanites' as a group of sexual psychopaths; but they are all unanimous in their opinion that converts, especially those to Catholicism, ought to be considered as weaklings. A hostile attitude, however, is least of all conducive to the formation of an impartial judgment and not very favourable to the explanation of a process which converts themselves often find it difficult to describe. Philosophers of this sort do not know how to enter into the mental state of a seeker for truth and have paid no heed to the warning which is implied in the words of an influential writer of about 1800, William Cobbett: "I don't understand that a man who has studied his theology doesn't realise the difference between conviction and conversion". Cobbett was not a theologian; nothing marked him as a man who was eminently qualified to pronounce an opinion on the problem of conversion; but the words just quoted show that he had a keener insight into the essence of a conversion than many an advocate of modern psychology.

There is an enormous distance between conviction and conversion. Of course, no man sincerely aspiring after truth changes his religion without the conviction having come to him that he will find the true

[16]) See Al. Janssens, *Anglicaansche Bekeerlingen;* R.K. Boek-Centrale, Amsterdam; 1928, p. 183.

Church in the other. This conviction is indispensably requisite for any genuine conversion. But it is at the same time the farthest point to which man, by his own means or by the aid of others, can attain. Beyond this, all activity of his intellectual faculties ceases, and it is only God's grace that induces him to take the step. Because of this ultimate dependence on heavenly grace a conversion is no more an act of weakness than of courage; at this critical stage it is equally difficult for all converts to carry their own conviction into practical effect. Theoretically several of the so-called Anglo-Catholics come very near the Catholic faith; some of them do not hesitate to subscribe to 11 of the 12 articles of the Credo, believe in Transubstantiation in the Catholic sense, acknowledge the infallibility of the Pope, and accept nearly all the moral prescriptions of the Catholic Church as a guidance for their religious life. The only thing needed to make them Catholics in fact is their reception into that Church. But the visit to the priest in order to be admitted makes all the difference and leaves them in exactly the same position as Newman occupied in September, 1845. The novel-writer, Sheila Kaye-Smith, had arrived at the conviction that in Rome she would find the true Church already twelve years before she submitted [17]).

The fact that for all converts their consent to baptism signifies a plunge into the unknown warns us that an assertion, often heard with respect to conversions of recent times, must be taken in a restricted sense. Penrose Fry, one of the contributors to Leahy's book, formulates it as follows: "It is a much smaller undertaking for an Anglican clergyman to leave the Church of England and join the Catholic Church to-day than it was for those brave souls of the 19th century". In order to prevent misapprehension it might have been safer to speak of "a less difficult undertaking", for it should not be supposed that, *emotionally*, the conversions of Dr. Kinsman, Ronald Knox, E. Lester, C. C. Martindale, H. E. G. Rope, Chesterton, and so many others, were easier than the conversions of Newman, W. Ward, Manning, T. W. Allies, etc.; nor should it be expected that a conversion will ever be an easy undertaking.

In every other sense, however, Fry's assertion is perfectly true. Before or in the days of the *No-Popery* movement it was indeed much more difficult for an Anglican to become a Catholic than 50 years later, because the circumstances under which the conviction had to be formed, were much more difficult and the consequences of a con-

[17]) See Maurice Leahy, *op. cit.*

version more serious. When we realise what prejudices "those brave souls" had to overcome before they could bring themselves to look upon the Catholic Church with the smallest amount of good-will, what they had to abandon when taking the step, and what were their prospects after this, it is really not too much to say that Fry's praise for their courage is fully deserved, and it will become clear how absurd it is to speak of 'weaklings'. It is also true that converts of a later date, e.g. after 1900, often had to reckon with the possibility that their deed might have unpleasant consequences for them; but they were received into a communion which in England at that time numbered about two million members[18]), and which was solidly backed by its visible, established Hierarchy, whereas the number of Catholics in England in 1840 amounted, according to Manning, still an Anglican in this year, to barely 200.000.

De Vere belongs to the last "deserters to the camp of the enemy" who may be said to have been in the Oxford Movement from start to finish, who long remained unaffected by it, but who were laid low by the Gorham controversy. There is much diversity of opinion as to the question when this storm in the Anglican Church had spent itself. In Christopher Dawson's judgment[19]) Newman's conversion in 1845 signified the end of the movement, which is also the view taken by Wilfrid Ward, whose book *W. G. Ward and the Oxford Movement* concludes with the year 1846; some writers think that the end had already come at an earlier date, about 1840, while others again maintain that the movement is still working. The consequences of the Oxford Movement have certainly not expired yet. The greater energy and activity shown by the orthodox Anglican clergy since the middle of the 19th century, e.g. in their voluntary Congresses and Councils[20]), the rapid spread, on the other hand, of Broad Church views among the Liberal group, and the endeavours of the late Lord Halifax and others to effect a corporate reunion with Rome[21]), are all the outcome of it. But practically the movement collapsed in 1850, when the Gorham controversy posed the question of the authority of the Church and when in the eyes of many Anglicans their idea of 'Church

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[18]) According to Shane Leslie, *The Oxford Movement*, p. 160. See also: Thureau Dangin, *La Renaissance Catholique en Angleterre*, vol. I; p. XV.

[19]) Christopher Dawson, *The Spirit of the Oxford Movement*, 1933.

[20]) See T. F. Tout, *op. cit.* p. 699; also Thureau Dangin, *op. cit.* vol. 1, p. VII.

[21]) Thureau Dangin, *op. cit.* pp. I-VI.

Principles' appeared to be incompatible with Anglicanism. De Vere was one of those "brave souls" who realised the deadliness of this blow and who accepted the consequences of the episcopal verdict.

In its main lines the process of De Vere's conversion is similar to that which took place in the souls of many others of his intellectual contemporaries and co-religionists. From a child a deep veneration for the High Church had been impressed upon him and the desire to put himself at the service of the Faith grew within him as time went on. In moments of speculation his thoughts turned by preference to the awe-inspiring greatness of the Church and, although he did not eventually follow the vocation which suited his religious zeal best, there seemed to be nothing that could ever shake his trust in Anglicanism. Circumstances of life and character cooperated to safeguard his firm belief against disturbing influences; his secluded abode in Ireland kept him "far from the madding crowd", and he hated controversy in any shape. If, therefore, fate should have called upon him to take an active part in the Oxford Movement, he would have played the part in it of the gentle Keble rather than that of the energetic Newman or the impetuous Ward. As it was, he kept aloof from all disputes on religious matters and if he did follow from afar the course which the movement took, it was because of a certain uneasiness about the rapid spread of some latitudinarian theories.

In one respect he was influenced by the inquiring spirit of his age: he spent much of his time on the study of theological works and concentrated his mind particularly upon the function of the Church. In these studies he was guided by four men who represented widely different schools of thought: Edmund Burke, S. T. Coleridge, F. D. Maurice, and J. H. Newman. But he bound himself to none of them by accepting their views without having duly considered the arguments. In the formation of his judgment De Vere was quite independent. He possessed to a high degree the gift, developed in him by his friend Sir William Rowan Hamilton, to see with a quick eye what was the fundamental idea underlying a writer's philosophy, and he had made it a principle to pay no heed to the differences of opinion and method which were due to party contests. Ignoring the mutual opposition of the four thinkers he set himself to analyse their theories and, once he was convinced of some truth, he never abandoned it again.

It was Coleridge who by his philosophy on religion, as it is set forth especially in *Aids to Reflection, Church and State,* and *Literary Re-*

mains (3rd and 4th volumes), impressed upon him the certainty that God had created a Church as an instrument for man to aid him in his reflections on the truths which God had revealed about Himself and the spiritual world. From his first years De Vere had felt in his heart those individual religious instincts of which every christian is conscious, but when he began to think what was the value of these instincts he did not fully trust them and was sometimes inclined to regard them as a mere 'enthusiasm', a feeling created by his own desires rather than infused into him from on high. Coleridge taught him to see in the collective mind and consciousness of Christendom a living testimony to the reality of God's Church and His revelation, a proof that this Church was instituted for all christians and for all ages. But Coleridge taught him also that no man could understand the Divine Truths and that he could only grasp them firmly in the light of Faith by his higher Reason. This was the first stage of De Vere's philosophical speculations. The thought of the catholicity of the Church, of her unity, and of her divine order, overpowered him and he embodied his conception of her greatness in several of his poems, e.g. *Fragments of Truth, Discipline of the Church,* and *Liberalism* (*The Waldenses,* 1842).

The further development of his thoughts on the Faith led him to the problem of the concrete form which the revealed truths must have assumed, should they be of any practical use for man. Here Coleridge did not serve him any longer as a guide, for Coleridge, although he was well aware that the Christian Church seemed to have split up into various other Churches and with it the body of Divine Truths, did not take much interest in what had become of Truth; he loved to speculate on Truth for Truth's sake, and not for the sake of religious controversies. He felt a patriotic love for the Church of England, but he could well have done without her as a religious institution. Her voice meant nothing to him, nor did the voice of any other "branch-Church". De Vere did not content himself with such idle speculation. He was convinced that the Apostolic Church as the visible representative of God's institution was imperishable and he argued that all the religious bodies which had sprung from her, and which each of them professed to have preserved the Divine Truths in their original form, were children, some good, some bad, of the united Christian Church, each receiving its light from the parent, just as planets receive their light from the sun. At one moment

of his search Newman entertained a similar view[22]). But, like many of his contemporaries, De Vere was puzzled by the fact that in the Anglican Church, in his eyes the best child, there was much diversity of opinion among theologians as to the exact creed. Coleridge's disciple, F. D. Maurice, solved Aubrey's difficulties by asserting that each man saw part of the whole truth and that the very opposition of convictions testified to the existence of a larger truth. This explanation put another problem before De Vere. He looked upon the Church as the only power that could teach the truths of God's revelation, could represent them, and could interpret them in the right way. The question with him, however, was how far the Church could go and wanted to go in this instruction. What did the Church teach and what had been added by man? The Cambridge group of thinkers, men such as Spedding, Sterling, Stephen Spring Rice, Tennyson, and Maurice at their head, took up the standpoint that the doctrines of the Church were confined to vague generalities, which each individual was at liberty to explain in his own way and shape into a belief of his own creation; or, as Wilfrid Ward puts it in his analysis of De Vere's letters on this subject: "Cambridge treated as the central standpoint the mind of the individual philosopher — which was judicially to appraise the evidence (i.e. of religion) before it"[23]). Most of the Oxford theologians, however, especially the Tractarian group among them, "regarded the mind of God, and not of man, as the centre of theology"[24]); they wanted to strip off all human additions brought to the Faith since the fourth century[25]) and strove to define precisely[26]) the truths as they were held at those early times. De Vere was convinced that man could not *produce* religion, which was practically what the Cambridge men wanted to do; but on the other hand he considered that man's thinking faculty and God's revelation were not given aimlessly and it appeared to him that the principles advocated by the Oxford group would prove too narrow for a *living* faith. Much of his correspondence with Stephen Spring Rice on this subject deals with what he calls "the excess of Formality" of the Oxford theologians on the one hand, and the "Vagueness" of the

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[22]) See W. H. v. d. Pol, *De Kerk in het leven en denken van Newman*, (Diss. Utrecht, 1936), p. 163.

[23]) W. Ward, *Memoir*, p. 48.

[24]) ibid. p. 48.

[25]) ibid. p. 48; Cp. also W. H. v. d. Pol, *op. cit.* p. 150.

[26]) W. Ward, *Memoir*, p. 55.

Cambridge men on the other[27]). He stood between the Oxford and Cambridge views and drew up for himself a compromise[28]) by assuming that the truths taught by the Apostolic Church were unchangeable and that it was left to the human mind "to adjust to modern conditions a theology whose roots were in antiquity"[29]).

Yet, while thus trying to reconcile the opinions of the Oxford divines to those of the Cambridge men, De Vere's sympathies were decidedly on the side of the former group, whose deeply religious conservatism and devout energy had seemed to him more practical during his visits to the two cities than the ingenious, but purely rationalistic and somewhat irreverent liberalism of the latter. Very soon after 1838 he came under the influence of Newman, whose clear expositions on the subject of dogma convinced him of the necessity of dogmatic teaching. But on this point De Vere was not yet prepared to go all lengths: he rejected any religious system in which doctrines were methodically worked out and were declared binding also in their details. This was in his opinion the great fault of the Latin Church: Rome had added numberless idolatrous ceremonies to the Apostolic Faith and had put a yoke of tyranny on its members by an ingenious fabric of organic laws and prohibitions. That is why in the next ten years he did not bestow a moment's serious thought on this system, and as late as 1848 that community remained as repellent to him as it then was to Manning, to whom he said that "the Roman Church was a stately ship come from an infected port and having the plague on board" (*Recoll.* p. 294). During all these years he tried to find a confirmation of the soundness of his religious views within the frame of the Anglican Church and his thoughts hardly moved outside this circle: "Old prepossessions and consequent misgivings were, however, strong with me, for I had long thought it a duty of loyalty to read Church history through Anglican spectacles" (*Recoll.* p. 294). But for this prejudice against the Catholic Church and the feeling of duty towards the Anglican Church, De Vere with his keen sense of logic would undoubtedly much sooner have woken up to the

[27]) *Memoir*, p. 55.

[28]) W. Ward calls De Vere's compromise a 'Via Media' (*Memoir*, p. 51, and p. 57); De Vere himself did not use the expression, he preferred the term 'Proportion of Faith'. At any rate Newman's term 'Via Media' had another meaning (See v. d. Pol, *op. cit.* p. 149). De Vere did not approve of Newman's term: he spoke of it as "that unlucky phrase *via media*, only politically applicable to our Church" (See W. Ward, *Memoir*, p. 104).

[29]) W. Ward, *Memoir*, p. 48.

truth that his Church was only national and therefore did not satisfy the condition of catholicity.

De Vere's changed attitude towards the Catholic Church, which is perceptible in 1848, is not attributable to influences from outside. Although the conversion of Newman and the two Marshalls in 1845, of his two brothers, Vere and Stephen, in 1846, and shortly after of T. W. Allies, Manning, and William Monsell (all of them relatives or intimate friends), made a deep impression upon him, these events in themselves did not greatly shake his conviction and he pursued his own course. His more kindly feelings towards Rome arose gradually. The study of his favourite masters had led him to look upon the Roman Church with distrust, but deep in his heart his prejudice against her was mixed with a feeling of awe awakened by the apparent power of the 'Giant Sect'. He remembered that Burke and Coleridge, and of course Newman after 1840, had also said some good things of the Latin Church, and he remembered especially Burke's appreciative words about order and discipline in the Irish Catholic Church: "The Roman Catholic clergy of Ireland .... are a very great service to the country"; and, "the catholic clergy must have all the knowledge, and what is to them more important than the knowledge, the discipline necessary to their professional and parochial duties" [30]). Aubrey saw his general impression of discipline in the Roman Church confirmed on his two visits to the Eternal City and it remained longest with him. In proportion as the external qualities of the Roman religion faded away in his memory, the internal elements of it, such as unity and universality, which had struck him forcibly during his stay in Italy, urged themselves more and more strongly upon him and at length he began to ask himself if these characteristics of the Roman Church were not to be identified with those of the Apostolic Church. The incessant war in the bosom of the Anglican Church between men who intellectually ranked equally high, accentuated the lack of unity in his ancestral religion and made him doubt whether his Church possessed the necessary authority to effect that unity. In such moments his eyes turned questioningly to Rome.

The Gorham question put an end to De Vere's doubts. This controversy arose from the refusal of Dr. Phillpotts, Bishop of Exeter, to institute the Rev. Mr. Gorham, who in November 1847 was pre-

[30]) See Letter on The Penal Laws against Irish Catholics; 3rd Vol. pp. 470-471 (*The Works of Edmund Burke;* new and improved edition, complete in 9 volumes. H. G. Bohn, London, 1846).

sented by the Crown for a curacy in that diocese. The Bishop reprimanded him for sustaining heretical views on the point of baptismal regeneration. Gorham, namely, held that the baptism of a child was invalid if the administration of it was not preceded or accompanied by interior grace, which opinion could be defended by one of the Thirty-Nine Articles. The Bishop's view, the ancient Catholic doctrine, was based on the Order of Baptism in the Prayer Book. Gorham appealed to the court of the Archbishop of Canterbury, which put the bishop in the right. But Gorham did not despair and put his case before the Privy Council of the Queen, a court which consisted of seven laymen; for this occasion, however, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Archbishop of York, and the Bishop of London were added to the number. This court cancelled the verdict of Canterbury and declared that Gorham's view was not contrary to the doctrine of the Anglican Church. Only the Vice-Chancellor and the Bishop of London were against this judgment. So even the Archbishop of Canterbury agreed! [31]).

The unsatisfactory settlement of this controversy in 1850 by means of a compromise convinced many Anglicans that their Church did not possess any authority at all to act as a teacher of religious truths and within a few years three or four hundred [32]) of the clergy left her. De Vere realized that he must either follow their example or admit that everything that had been taught him since his youth had been untrue. He did not give up his 'Church Principles', and so no other choice was left to him but turn his back upon Anglicanism. But, in doing so, he was not a Catholic yet! Many were the Anglicans who had gone the same road before him and who had ended by falling victims to Scepticism and Unbelief. A life without religion, however, was inconceivable in a man like De Vere, who would have lost in it all that was worth living for. He began to study Church history from Catholic sources and he soon made the discovery that several objections raised against the doctrines of the Catholic Church were without any foundation and usually were grounded on passages torn from their contexts. During this period of nearly two years St. Thomas Aquinas, whom he studied in a compendium of his *Summa Theologiae,* was his principal teacher. Gradually his prejudices against Rome fell away and in 1851 he was certain that the end of his studies would be submission to the Catholic Church. In November of that

[31]) See Thureau Dangin, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 147.

[32]) According to De Vere; see *Recoll.*, p. 262.

year he went to Rome for the third time, in the company of Henry Edward Manning, who had already been a Catholic for some months. During their stay at Avignon the grace of heaven came to De Vere and on the 15th of the same month he was received into the Catholic Church.

d. Character and Friendships

Aubrey de Vere was one of those of whom we are apt to think that they ought never to die. He was beloved by every one of his acquaintances for his tenderness, his childlike simplicity, his lofty moral rectitude, and his sweetness of manners. In whatever company he appeared he brought an atmosphere of genial light and gladness with him. "In the presence of Aubrey de Vere there is the vigorous freshness of morning", wrote Miss Helen Grace Smith, sister of Mr. Walter George Smith of Philadelphia, a member of the University of Pennsylvania, and at one time President of the American Historical Society; "or else", she continued, thinking of the poet's old age when she saw him, "his is one of those rare evenings of life, when the sky is lighted to the very zenith with the glow of sunset. His eyes are clear and bright, kindling, as he speaks, with rare enthusiasm; he has a keen sense of humour, the gift of all Irishmen, and at the same time a calm dignified presence" [33]). Those who knew him used to be struck by his personality as that of one who had a touch of mediaeval holiness about him, and 'The Bookworm' in *The Academy* was not the only friend who thought of him almost as of a saint. Edmund Gosse described his appearance at the age of eighty-three as that of one who had "an ecclesiastical air like that of some highly cultivated, imaginative old abbé. He possessed a sort of distinguished innocence, a maidenly vivacious brightness, very charming and surprising" [34]). De Vere was all goodness and unselfishness. If he halved, as he said he did, his income by publishing his own poems, he must have spent a large part of the remaining half also by editing and distributing the poems of his friends — from Coventry Patmore's *Odes* to Sir Stephen de Vere's translations from Horace. Most of his friends had these, and other presentation copies on their shelves. In his zeal to propagate the work of others he generously ignored his own. Once in early life, when he revisited, after an interval, his great

[33]) *Memoir*, p. 394.
[34]) ibid. p. 390.

friend Sir William Rowan Hamilton, the astronomer told him that the night before he had said to his little boy: "To-morrow Aubrey de Vere will be here: are you glad?" The boy had answered remorsefully: "Thinking of Latin, and thinking of trouble, and thinking of God, I had forgotten Aubrey de Vere". The words have a strange aptitude. The habitual attitude of Aubrey de Vere, thinking of every one but himself and "thinking of God", was to forget — Aubrey de Vere. But perhaps the finest trait of his character was his loyalty to his friends. He valued friendly relations higher than the possession of worldly goods. He was a man who needed friends, with whom he could talk and correspond about literature and all that filled him with enthusiasm; whom he could visit or could receive at Curragh Chase to break the monotony of his life; and whom he could aid with his extensive knowledge and critical insight. He deemed the loss of a friend a more serious calamity than any physical suffering, and he wrote more about the death of a man whom he had chanced to meet a few times than about the scarlet fever with which he was down in 1856.

Wordsworth, Henry Taylor, and Newman were his most intimate friends in England. It was one of the happiest moments in his life when, for the first time, in June 1841, he met the great poet in London at the house of William Marshall M. P., whose daughter was married to De Vere's cousin, Thomas Charles Spring Rice. Wordsworth's host knew Aubrey's deep veneration for the Rydal Bard and lost no opportunity to bring them together. At that time Aubrey spent many days of rapture in the company of Wordsworth. However, his happiness increased when, in 1842, during his stay at Rydal, he was invited by Wordsworth as a guest. He counted it "the highest honour in my life" to have slept with the great poet under the same roof. It was also through Wordsworth that he made the acquaintance of Miss Fenwick, an old lady who lived at about three miles' distance from Wordsworth's cottage and who played a prominent part in Wordsworth's circle of friends [35]: Hartley Coleridge, eldest son of S. T. Coleridge, the Arnolds, the Quillinans, and R. P. Graves, the biographer of Sir William Rowan Hamilton. But the most valued of Aubrey's friends acquired through Wordsworth was Sara Coleridge, the daughter of S. T. Coleridge and widow of her cousin, Henry Nelson Coleridge. She was thirty-nine years of age. During the ten years which she was still to live after their first meeting in London,

[35]) See David Watson Rannie, *Wordsworth and his Circle*, 1907.

June 1841, he found in his intercourse with the authoress of *Phantasmion* the same spiritual delight which the daily company of his sister Ellen, before her marriage, had given him. Especially in the summer of 1845, as the *Diary* tells us which Aubrey kept at that time, he took her out almost every day and sat with her for long evenings, talking of poetry, of philosophy, of theology, and of her father. Their correspondence, too, was very lively in the 'forties, and of all De Vere's letters perhaps the finest, or in any case the deepest and the most thoughtful, were addressed to Sara Coleridge. But the affection between them was purely spiritual and intellectual: the thought of a closer relationship seems never to have come to either.

Henry Taylor was De Vere's earliest friend. Their first meeting, which took place in London, December 1838, was occasioned by Taylor's projected marriage with Aubrey's brilliant cousin, Theodosia Alice Spring Rice. At that time Taylor, a clerk in the Colonial Office, was at the height of his fame as a dramatist. Aubrey's introduction to the author of *Philip van Artevelde*, to which moment he had eagerly looked forward, was the most memorable event during his stay in London and was the beginning of a friendship between the two men which lasted for life. From the outset Aubrey treated Taylor like a brother and the affectionate feeling seems to have been reciprocated. In his autobiography Taylor wrote: "After my marriage I was not long in finding how rich a dowry of friendship my wife had brought me in Aubrey de Vere" [36]). And yet, even with these words before us, we doubt whether the brotherly affection was as deeply rooted in Taylor as in De Vere. Taylor certainly showed himself no true Damon after De Vere's conversion and there are some passages in his writings which prove that love of his own self always ranked first with him. In De Vere the affection was genuine. He always spoke of Henry Taylor with loving admiration and, if in later years correspondence between them slackened, it was not owing to any diminution of his interest in Taylor's life and well-being.

The bond with Henry Taylor widened De Vere's circle of friends considerably. Men like James Spedding, the biographer of Lord Bacon, Tennyson, and Richard Monckton Milnes became his almost daily companions during his first visits to England, and in their turn they introduced him to several other Cambridge students. From this time also dates his friendship with Mrs. Villiers, the widow of Edward Villiers, brother of the fourth Earl of Clarendon. She figures in

[36]) Sir Henry Taylor, *Autobiography*, vol. I; p. 309.

Aubrey's life almost as prominently as Sara Coleridge. Their first meeting took place on his second journey to Italy, in 1843, with the Taylors, after news had reached them that Edward Villiers, Taylor's dearest friend, lay seriously ill at Nice. They hurried to his sick-bed and were present in his last hours. After Villier's death De Vere frequently sought the company of Mrs. Villiers, and some of his letters to her in the first years of her widowhood betray a sentiment in him which any wary woman would have understood as love-making. However, it led to nothing and perhaps De Vere's amenities had no other meaning than the expression of that same Platonic love which characterizes most of his love-poems. With the exception of Sara Coleridge no friend corresponded so much with him as Mrs. Villiers and no one had so sincerely his sympathy as she. Towards 1850, when it became clear that De Vere would remain a bachelor, several of these relations had ripened in him into bonds of friendship which replaced in his heart the affections for a family of his own.

It is difficult to imagine what it meant for De Vere to feel the estrangement from these friends, caused by his conversion. No loss in his Catholic period impressed him so deeply as the loss of their love and their interest. Knowing the antipathy of Henry Taylor, of Sir William Rowan Hamilton, of Miss Isabella Fenwick, and of Mrs. Villiers to the Catholic religion he realised that estrangement from these friends was inevitable and he seems to have reconciled himself to the idea of a breach with them, as appears from the following passage in a letter to Mrs. Villiers, written on October 25, 1851: "If the friends whom I have loved most deeply and most steadily choose to cast me off, they may do so; but they must do so wholly. I shall in that case have learned one lesson more (I have learned several of late years), and I shall form no more friendships. I should have been true to them under all circumstances. If they act thus, they act heartlessly, though probably not without remorse of heart" [37]). He had resolutely made up his mind as to the path he would follow; and yet, when in 1852 he returned to England a Catholic, it gave him deep pain to experience that all bonds were severed. Shortly before he took the step Carlyle had come to him with the warning: "I have ridden over here to tell you not to do that thing. You were born free. Do not go into that hole" [38]); Browning, whom Aubrey met at Florence on his way back from Rome, and Sir James Stephen, Under

[37]) *Memoir*, p. 191.
[38]) *Recollections*, p. 321.

Secretary in the Colonial Office, condemned his change of religion, and Dr. John Jebb, Canon of Hereford and nephew of Bishop Jebb of Limerick, sent him word that now the friendship between them had come to an end. But Aubrey would gladly have put up with the loss of acquaintances like Carlyle, Browning, Stephen, and Dr. Jebb, if he could have retained only one of his dearest relations, Hamilton, Taylor, Miss Fenwick, Sara Coleridge, and Mrs. Villiers, all of whom sent him neither warning nor reproof, and turned away from him. He, however, remained true to them all his life and when Death took Sara Coleridge in 1852 (he did not see her again after his leave in 1851), and Miss Fenwick and Aubrey's mother in 1856, he continued to cherish their memory with the same love. After many years much of the old ardour returned in Henry Taylor, but the friendship between Aubrey and Mrs. Villiers never became what it had been before.

Among the Catholics J. H. Newman was De Vere's earliest and most intimate friend. Aubrey had made his acquaintance on his first visit to Oxford in 1838 when Newman was still an Anglican. He had a letter of introduction to Newman from the Rev. J. H. Todd, Fellow of Trinity College, Dublin, and he lost no time in presenting himself to the famous vicar of St. Mary's. At their first meeting he was honoured by being asked to breakfast with Newman the next morning and was delighted to be introduced at this meal to his host's young friend, Frederick Rogers, afterwards Lord Blachford, a man whose marvellous gift of "sure-footed rapidity" in the despatch of business used to fill Henry Taylor with astonishment. After breakfast Newman placed De Vere in the hands of Mr. Thomas Mozley, Newman's brother-in-law, who was to act as his guide among the objects of special interest at Oxford, an office not less kindly discharged the next day by William Palmer, afterwards Sir William Palmer[39]), and author of the *Treatise on the Church*. Aubrey never forgot the kindness with which Newman had received him and in the fifty years of close friendship which followed he had more than once an opportunity to show his gratitude and his attachment to the great convert. One of these opportunities offered itself in 1856, when Newman requested him to deliver a series of lectures on literature at the Catholic University of Dublin, founded in 1851. With characteristic modesty De Vere wrote in his *Recollections* (p. 264): "I considered myself in-

[39]) See *Recollections*, p. 257; also W. Ward, *W. G. Ward and the Oxford Movement*, Macmillan; 2nd ed. 1890, p. 53.

competent for such a task; but I could not refuse compliance with a wish of his, and, although not a professor, I delivered about a dozen lectures, the substance of two among which was long afterwards (1889) published in a volume of essays"[40]).

After his conversion we often find De Vere in the company of other Catholics, most of them converts: Manning, W. Monsell, T. W. Allies, Faber, Ambrose Phillipps de Lisle, Patmore, Alice Meynell, and the editor of his works, Kegan Paul. His friendship with the later Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster, Herbert Vaughan, son of an old Catholic family, dated from 1851 in Rome, and with Wilfrid Ward, his future biographer, from 1875. Several of these intimacies sprang up at the house of Lady Herbert of Lea and of Lady Georgiana Fullerton, whose drawing-rooms were centres of the Catholic society in London in the latter half of the 19th century[41]). But De Vere did not turn away from his Anglican acquaintances. Literary interests made him forget all differences of religion and he always respected another man's convictions, although he sometimes tried to help others on to Rome. For instance, he urged Coventry Patmore to join the Catholic Church[42]), and he had an important share in the conversion of the anonymous authoress of *Sidelights on the Oxford Movement.*

De Vere's friendly relations also extended to France and America. At Paris a group of writers, connected with the monthly *Le Correspondant* (founded in 1831), were trying to propagate Christian principles and Christian thought among their contemporaries, and De Vere's interest in their work led to a lively correspondence with the chief figures in the movement: Count Charles De Montalembert, afterwards author of *Moines de L'Occident,* Lacordaire, and Madame Pauline Craven, author of *Récit d'une Soeur.* Among his American connections he counted the poets Longfellow and Lowell, the Dante-student Professor Charles Eliot Norton, and the classicist Philip S. Worsley, whose translation of Homer was much admired. All these Americans differed from Aubrey in religion, but still, he felt himself at one with them through his love of the Middle Ages and his veneration of the classics. At their request he published a volume of his

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[40]) J. Elliot Ross gives in his work *John H. Newman* (1933) a list of lecturers in the Catholic University, in which De Vere is mentioned as lecturer on 'Political and Social Science'.

[41]) *Alice Meynell,* by Viola Meynell, 1929; p. 49-50.

[42]) *Memoirs and Correspondence of Coventry Patmore,* in 2 vols.; by Basil Champneys; London, Bell and Sons, 1901; vol. 1, p. 142.

poems for American readers, *Irish Odes and Other Poems* (New York, 1869), and one of them, Professor G. E. Woodberry, edited an anthology of his poetical works. Most of these literary men remained only correspondents; with the exception of Longfellow, whom he met in London, in 1868, of Professor Woodberry, in 1891, of Miss Grace Norton, Charles Eliot Norton's sister, and of Andrew J. George, who reviewed his works in 1902, he knew none of them personally. But they all shared in his generous distribution of presentation copies, and his American reviewer could declare that in this way he had become "the proud possessor of them all", the works of Aubrey, of Sir Aubrey, and of his brother Stephen.

Of De Vere it may be said what has been said of Southey that he had a genius for friendship. When he had once made the acquaintance of a man in whom he discovered tastes or sympathies corresponding to his own, it meant with him friendship for life and sometimes he did not forsake him even in death. Every year he went on his round of visits to Newman at Birmingham, to the Taylors at Bournemouth, to the Tennysons at Aldworth and at Farringford, but also to Wordsworth in his grave. Nobody ever refused De Vere's friendship. He never consciously offended the feelings of a man, and even in the hearts of those who were painfully hurt by his conversion no bitterness was harboured against him. No word of his was ever tainted with jealousy or the spirit of rivalry. In full truth his brother, Sir Stephen de Vere, could declare of him, in 1902, that "he left not an enemy". This is perhaps an expression of brotherly love? Wilfrid Meynell, who knew him well as a member of the Athenaeum Club in London, testified as readily to the amiability of Aubrey's character: "Personally Aubrey de Vere was one of the most beloved of men. No one ever heard him say a bitter thing". And the finest testimony of all is that, in return, nobody ever wrote "a bitter thing" of De Vere.

Not that so amiable a personality never experienced moments of anguish and perplexity. When Tennyson's drama *Queen Mary* appeared it was natural for critics to compare its qualities with those of Sir Aubrey's *Mary Tudor*, and it filled the son's heart with pride to hear Matthew Arnold declare that Sir Aubrey's was the better performance; but great also was his agony as a friend when he thought how Tennyson would take this judgment. His guileless heart was subjected to a still severer torment when at the appearance of his own *St. Thomas of Canterbury*, which drama preceded Tennyson's *Becket*, his rival remarked to him, with a touch of irony in his tone:

"So you have taken Becket out of my hands". De Vere's character was more childlike and feminine than masculine and some of his remarks betray a certain naivety in him. When, in 1848, Tennyson stayed at Curragh Chase, Aubrey wrote to Mrs. Villiers with reference to this visit: "I wonder why he came, and whether he is fond of me. I fear not much so"! This note in his character certainly did not escape such a keen observer as Wilfrid Meynell, who pictured him as follows: "He was not subtle, and perhaps the gentle raillery of some of his friends — men and women — left him baffled rather than enlightened in matters where they thought him — was it old-maidish? He preserved through life the simplicity of a child in great things and small, even when, as in matters of publishing business, he fancied that he was shrewd, or when he declared that he thought he really would go into a monastery if he saw a lady smoke — the great friend in whom he thus unsuspectingly confided having only accidentally kept her cigarettes out of his sight".

e. Last Years and Death

With the account of his friendships, given in the preceding chapter, the story of De Vere's life, as a narrative of incidents, has practically come to an end. After the few years of his adaptation to his new surroundings in the Catholic world he was still in the prime of manhood; he had still nearly half a century to live; and yet, in surveying the long span from the early 'fifties until the year of his death there is no longer any change, any movement in new directions to be recorded. In his habits, in his principles, and in his sympathies De Vere remained the same man throughout his Catholic period. He might advance in years, but, as his friends said, he ever remained youthful in his heart. Some of the political and social changes he witnessed in the second half of the 19th century agitated his mind deeply, especially the Disestablishment of the Protestant Church in 1869, the Land Bills for Ireland in 1870 and 1881, and the death of Henry Taylor in 1886; but, for the rest, his life glided on tranquilly and undisturbed, in much the same way as it had done before his conversion.

In one respect there is a difference: Curragh Chase had become dearer to De Vere than it had ever been. Shortly after his return to Ireland in June, 1852, he resumed his habit of yearly visiting his friends, now mostly Catholics: the Vaughans at Courtfield, a place

at about fifty miles' distance from Curragh Chase; William Monsell (afterwards Lord Emly) at Tervoe (co. Limerick); the Tennysons in the Isle of Wight, their neighbour Sir John Simeon, under whose roof Aubrey composed his first poems as a Catholic, and Ambrose Lisle Phillipps at Grace Dieu in Leicestershire; but these friendships, although much prized by him, hardly compensated what he had lost in his old associations; they did not excite in him that enthusiasm and that warmth which had given life to his intercourse with Henry Taylor, Sara Coleridge, and Mrs. Villiers. Aubrey found an antidote to the estrangement from these old relations in his new religion and in his Irish home. For many years he kept away from the more rigid Anglicans he had known. In the beginning he particularly shunned London society, and until the rise of the Fenian movement he seemed to take little interest in what was going on about him. He preferred to live in the peaceful seclusion of Curragh Chase where he could gratify his most fervent wish — to study the works of the Fathers and to dwell in his thoughts 'alone with God'. In its beautiful park he frequently contemplated the great blessing that had come to him and that filled his heart with "a daily increasing satisfaction in the course I have adopted", as he wrote to his sister; here he pondered on the Mysteries of the Incarnation and Transubstantiation, on the celestial beauty of the Holy Virgin, on the wisdom of the Gospel, which the works of the Catholic theologians now represented to him in a clearer light; and in thus speculating on the Divine Truths and the greatness of the Catholic Church he enjoyed the spiritual freedom which his new religion allowed him. In the letters which he sent to his Anglican friends during the first years of his Catholic period Aubrey repeatedly insisted on his gain in spiritual freedom and elevation. The outcome of his contemplations at Curragh Chase were the two volumes which he published in 1855 and 1857, *Poems* and *May Carols*.

Besides his home affections and his religious faith, another element in De Vere had been intensified by his conversion, namely, his patriotism. Love of his country had always been strong in Aubrey; it was a characteristic feature of his earliest poetry and, in 1848, at the time of the great Irish famine, his patriotic feeling had stimulated him to write a spirited pamphlet in defence of his country's rights. His submission to the Catholic Church made him a member of the national Church in Ireland, and this membership added greatly to his interest in Irish politics. Henceforth the questions connected with

the oppression of this national Church concerned his own religion. It is not wonderful, therefore, that the two poems *The Sisters* and *Inisfail*, which he published in 1861 and 1863, should both of them treat of Ireland's historical past. After 1856 the memory of his dead parents, too, contributed to strengthen the bond between him and his country; they lay buried in the little cemetery at Curragh Chase, and the daily sight of their graves made the Irish soil more sacred to him. It would be untrue to say that his love for England diminished in proportion as his attachment to Ireland became stronger, but it is evident from his literary publications as well as from his mode of life during his Catholic period that, after his conversion, he felt Ireland to be his real home, whereas before 1851 he himself would have declared that his heart was with England. It was in his Catholic period that he visited Galway, Sligo, Donegal, and nearly all the other counties of Ireland which before his conversion had seemed to interest him less than England.

In 1866 De Vere was startled from his religious contemplations at Curragh Chase by the agitation in Ireland which is known as the Fenian movement. In 1857 a secret association had been founded in Paris under the name of The Irish Brotherhood, whose members had vowed to free Ireland from the English yoke. They soon spread over America where they adopted the name of Fenians[43]). During and after the Civil War in America great numbers of them came over to Ireland in order to raise an army there and prepare the population for an insurrection. The movement found many supporters, especially among the working classes, and in 1867 the leaders thought the time come to strike a blow. In March an attempt at an insurrection was made; a few months later part of the Clerkenwell prison in London was blown up in order to rescue two Fenian prisoners who were detained there, and in November two partisans were rescued from a police-van in Manchester, in which enterprise a policeman was shot. The first two plans were total failures, and the immediate result of the whole agitation was that a few innocent people were killed and three young Fenians were executed.

The activities of the Fenians filled De Vere with horror. He denounced insurrection, murder, and disobedience to legal authority as Jacobinical methods to get wrongs redressed, and in his eyes Jacobinism was utterly inconsistent with the principles of the Catholic Faith. Above all, it pained him to see that some of the Catholic priests

[43]) W. Mulder S.J., *De Iersche kwestie*, Leiden, 1923; p. 38.

sympathized with the movement. Therefore, when in 1866 Bishop Moriarty of Kerry severely censured these clergymen for their disloyalty, Aubrey was wholly on the Bishop's side and, expressing to him his gratitude as a Catholic, he urged him to publish his pastoral in the form of a pamphlet.

But, while strongly disapproving of the revolutionary methods of the Fenians, De Vere was not blind to the wrongs of his Catholic countrymen. Already in 1848, when he was still an Anglican, he had insisted on the necessity of removing that one crying injustice — the maintenance of the Protestant Church as the State-Church in Ireland, and now, in the days of the Fenian movement, he renewed his demand. In as many as six pamphlets, all of them published between 1866 and 1868, he urged the English Government to take measures for disestablishing the Protestant Church in Ireland and for redistributing its funds among the two Churches on the principle of equality. At the close of the year 1868 it was fairly certain what the fate of the Protestant Church would be. The Fenian agitation had opened the eyes of some clear-headed English statesmen to Irish grievances and one of these statesmen was Gladstone, who had just come into power and whose intention to deal with the Church-anomaly was fully known. De Vere had corresponded with him on the subject and had received from him the general assurance that "my views of the Irish Church as an Establishment are probably not far from yours, and I hear with satisfaction of your labours, and of anything that may tend to an adequate preparation of the public mind for the future"[44]). The disestablishment became a fact in July, 1869, but Aubrey was greatly disappointed in the provisions that were made. He had always maintained that the only right course to take was that the funds of the Irish Church, which were estimated at £ 16.000.000[45]), should be used for religious purposes. Gladstone was in favour of such a solution, as he expressly told De Vere[46]); but the Liberal Prime Minister had to humour his allies, the Radicals, who wanted to see the funds appropriated by the State.

The disestablishment of the Protestant Church was followed by more than ten years of political unrest in Ireland. It is the period in which Gladstone introduced his first Land Bill (1870) and saw his

[44]) *Memoir*, p. 284, note.

[45]) Justin MacCarthy, *A History of our own times*, Tauchnitz ed. 1880; vol. V, p. 16.

[46]) *Memoir*, p. 289.

Irish University Education Bill rejected (1873); in which the Home Rule movement (1873), the policy of systematic obstruction in Parliament (1875), and the Land League (1879) were started; in which Gladstone's second Land Bill was passed (1881) and the Phoenix Park murders were committed (1882). For De Vere it was a period in which his hopes of seeing his remaining ideals realised were shattered one by one. His sympathy with his countrymen on the point of University Education was hardly less keen than his interest in Irish Church Property had been. He strongly opposed the secularistic principle in education, and he urged the Government to grant a chartered Catholic University to Ireland. Gladstone, however, disappointed him a second time by introducing a scheme that neither Catholics nor Protestants could accept.

De Vere visited Rome in 1870, the year in which the Vatican Council was sitting over the dogma of Papal Infallibility. On his return to England he found Parliament in hot debate on Gladstone's first Land Bill. Being a lifelong pensioner of the landlord class, Aubrey naturally followed the discussions with great interest. He noted with satisfaction that one member of the Cabinet, Mr. Bright, aimed at promoting a large addition of peasant proprietors to the existing landed proprietors; but he received with distrust one of the chief clauses of the Bill, the one which forced landlords to compensate their outgoing tenants for improvements effected by them, and also in the case of a "capricious eviction". Aubrey feared that at a later time this clause might be appealed to as a proof that the landlord and the tenant were recognised co-proprietors in a single property (Dual Ownership). And so it turned out. In 1881 Gladstone brought forward his second Land Bill, which explicitly stated that the Government recognised the tenant's co-proprietorship. This was De Vere's third disappointment. He had hoped that after the disestablishment of the Protestant Church Ireland would return to order and peace, and that such questions as University Education and Tenant Right would be settled in a spirit of mutual understanding. Instead he saw the Land League and the Home Rule movement 'boycotting' the landlords, as part of a 'plan of campaign', and trying to get the land in their possession by rapine, as he called it, and committing murder in broad daylight, just as in the days of the Fenian movement. In Aubrey's eyes Parnellitism was as Jacobinical in its tendencies and methods as Fenianism, and he spoke to this effect in a letter which he had published in the *Tablet* (January 15, 1881). But the letter was anonymous, being signed by

the name of 'Catholicus'. Was it fear of the rough, 'Jacobinical' methods that made him write under a pseudonym? In 1882 and in 1885 he published two pamphlets, one on Constitutional and Unconstitutional Political Action, the other on Ireland and Proportional Representation, which aimed at preventing a wrong being done to the landlord class; but his attempt only added one more to his disappointments. After this failure he drew away from Irish politics in disgust.

As De Vere grew older, seventy, eighty, eighty-five, he began to live more and more in the past. Early in the 'sixties he had described in a letter to Sir William Rowan Hamilton the effect which Curragh Chase always produced on him after coming home from a long journey: "Here I am, once more, in my old home, and alone; for my eldest brother and his wife are in England. It is to me haunted ground. After a time, of course, this effect wears off; but at first, after coming here, it really seems to me a sort of enchantment. The present becomes almost nothing — a mere vapour — and the past becomes so distinct that I recognise the steps of the departed as well as their voices. The most trivial incidents rise up before me wherever I go; and in every room of the house, and every walk of the garden or woods, I see again the old gestures, expressions of face, even accidents of dress, which no one could fancy could live in memory. I allude of course to my father and mother principally, but not to them only. Very old friends, most of them long since dead, walk with them; and the old jests are repeated, but with a strange mixture of pathos and mirth; and my brothers and sisters seem to me once more as in the old days of childhood or opening youth" [47]). Such reflections on the past, mingling with his speculations on the Faith, now began to occupy De Vere's mind. He derived a keen pleasure from living over, in his memory, the old days again, and his power to recall vivid pictures from the past dispelled the sense of loneliness that was gradually descending over him in the evening of his life. In 1886 Henry Taylor took his place among the revered dead. The death of his best friend affected De Vere deeply. He lost in him one of the last links with the time of his happy youth, a friend who in everything, except in religion, had always felt and thought exactly as he did. For some time the expression of his grief at the loss was the chief note in his letters to all those who had known Henry Taylor, and the annual visits to his friend's grave show that he did not forget him to the end of his life.

[47]) *Memoir*, p. 248.

In 1890 Newman died; on the first day of the year 1891 Mrs. Henry Taylor, Aubrey's cousin, went to join her husband; Tennyson passed away in 1892, and Richard Holt Hutton followed five years later. As friend after friend was taken away, Aubrey's sense of loneliness increased and his interest in the outer world diminished more and more. Before the termination of his literary career in 1897 he had been comforted by the thought that his poetry had not wholly failed to attract attention in a forgetful world; but Aubrey had long since given up the hope of poetic fame, a hope that had at one time been very dear to him.

After 1898 De Vere discontinued his yearly visits to England. Although, to outward appearance, he was still vigorous and his step elastic, signs of old age began to appear and the exertion of travel became too much for him. From now on he remained in Ireland. He suffered from occasional abstractedness of mind, and letterwriting became a burden to him. For some years past his solitary life at Curragh Chase had been brightened by the company of his niece, Mrs. Monsell (a daughter of Mrs. Robert O'Brien) and her children, who in 1887 had come to live at his old home. He was very fond of them and used to tell them stories or read poetry to them. But at the age of eighty he had to give up this pastime, too, for his voice, which had already lost much of its melodiousness and power, had by then almost sunk to a whisper.

The end came soon and may best be told in the words of his biographer: "He was in his usual health up to January 12, 1902, two days after his eighty-eighth birthday. On that day he went to Mass at Adare in an open carriage. He caught a chill, and became seriously ill on Tuesday the 14th. Even in his wanderings he was constantly praying for his friends, 'holy and saintlike', writes his niece, Mrs. De Vere, 'in his death as in his life'. Mrs. De Vere's stepmother, Mrs. George Wynne, was near him constantly. His old friend Dean Flanagan came from Adare to see him, and Father Fitzgerald gave him the last sacraments, and was often with him to the end. He remained unconscious, hovering between life and death for a few days.

On the 21st at 7.30 in the morning, and quite peacefully at last, his gentle spirit made that passage of which he had so often spoken and written — from the land of Dreams to the land of Realities".

II. THE EVEN TENOR OF DE VERE'S POETICAL WORKS

a. Parental Examples

One small volume of poems, entitled *A Song of Faith, Devout Exercises, and Sonnets*[1]), and three dramas are all that Sir Aubrey de Vere has left to posterity, a contribution to English literature modest indeed in quantity, but a literary bequest which for its artistic merits is worthy to be named with the finest work of his son and of Wordsworth. As a dramatist Sir Aubrey is not surpassed by any of his contemporaries; in dramatic power and construction his historical play on *Mary Tudor* is not inferior to Tennyson's *Queen Mary*, Henry Taylor's *Philip van Artevelde*, Aubrey de Vere's *St. Thomas of Canterbury*, or even to Shelley's *The Cenci;* and the literary qualities of his sonnets are such as to secure him a high place among the sonneteers of the 19th century.

There are several evidences in Sir Aubrey's life which prove that the artistic sense was strong in him. As a boy he greatly enjoyed the beauty of the Lake District and of his own country, and throughout his life he showed a passionate attachment to the fine arts. "In sickness", says his son in the short Memoir which he wrote in honour of his father and which he prefixed to the two editions of *Mary Tudor*, "he would sometimes have lists of pictures in foreign galleries read aloud to him, and guess how the subjects were treated by the various masters". In his hands, indeed, the adornment of Curragh Chase became one of the fine arts, and was carried out with the eye of a painter. Even in the comparative paucity of his literary works may be traced the delicacy of his taste which led him to write with that poetic parsimony which gives only of its best.

The artistic sense in Sir Aubrey found its fullest expression in

[1]) W. Pickering, London, 1842; republished in 1875.

poetry, especially in that most elegant form, the sonnet. During the twenty-five years of his literary career he wrote about one hundred and fifty sonnets. He dedicated the volume in which they appeared to Wordsworth, whose genius in the art of sonnet-writing he had hailed from the beginning. Wordsworth accepted the dedication by contributing his poem *The Formal World Relaxes her Cold Chain* as a motto to the volume. As regards the character of their subjects the grouping of the sonnets into *Religious and Moral, On Character and Events, Descriptive, Personal,* and *Historical,* is sufficiently indicative of the Wordsworthian pattern.

But, although admiring the Rydal Bard and following him to some extent in using his favourite form of poetical expression, Sir Aubrey did not blindly imitate him. He had his own tastes, principles, and ideas, and he refused to sacrifice them to those of others, even of poets whom he recognised as his masters; he was willing to learn from them, but he preserved his independence throughout his career. Indeed, it is this adherence to his own conception of poetic art which marks Sir Aubrey as one of Wordsworth's least faithful disciples.

The religious poems are by far the most numerous in the volume. Religiousness was the principal feature in Sir Aubrey's life. He was heart and soul an Anglican, who did not see Faith merely as a matter of observing the commandments, but who also considered it his duty to stand up for his convictions at all times and stimulate his fellowmen to deeper devotion. "Confession of our faith is duty", he exhorted in *A Song of Faith,* and he practised this teaching himself by giving utterance in this poem, in the *Devout Exercises,* and in the *Religious and Moral Sonnets,* to his own deep-rooted religious life. In all these poems he wanted to serve truth, and from this aspiration his devotional poetry derived its predominantly didactic character. His confession of faith in verse form mainly amounts to a description of religious truths, exposition of moral conceptions, and paraphrases of fragments from psalms and prayers, all this described "under the influence of the poetical temperament", as he expressed it in the preface to the volume.

What Sir Aubrey understood by 'the poetical temperament' was description in rhetorical style. His poetry is marked by a highly literary language. His rhetoric is not of the same character, however, as the poetic diction to which Wordsworth took exception in his Preface. It is true that in the poems word-combinations and metaphors are found which Wordsworth in his striving after poetic truth

would certainly have condemned, e.g. "bulwarks thunder-riven", "the white-throated surges", "the replenished fountains of the sight", "the pageant race-ground's noisy rabble-shout", and "when the storm-steed rushes o'er the wild waves tumultuously thronging, smiting their wan crests"; but such defects rarely occur in Sir Aubrey's description. His literary language is no mechanical imitation of contemporaries or immediate predecessors, but the language of a man in whom literary words have become a habitual mode of expression, acquired from an attentive study of earlier poets and "our ancient ecclesiastical writers". If any special influence is to be noted in it, it is that of the Bible and of Sir Walter Scott, who both as a novelist and as a poet was the object of his greatest admiration next to Wordsworth. Like Scott, Sir Aubrey felt drawn more to the past than to the present or the future, and his predilection for the Middle Ages was expressed not only in the choice of his subjects, the *Historical Sonnets,* but also in his language, the use of obsolete phrases, such as "of eld", "our hearts are hungered", and even in the old spelling of some words, e.g. antient, skreening, shalm (shawm), polemicks, and to lour (to lower). Sir Aubrey's style always remained independent, however, and his rhetoric is more genuine and spontaneous than the 18th century diction which Wordsworth denounced. His forcible language communicated to all his poetry a stateliness and massiveness which reminds the reader a little of Milton's music, and sometimes a faint echo of the organ-tones of the great master's melody can be heard in Sir Aubrey's verse, as, for instance, in the following hymn from *A Song of Faith:*

Frail as thou art, Man, turn thee to thy God!
Confession of our faith is duty; worship
Glorifies God below; an humble prayer
Draws to obedience, and averts from sin;
Solaces all afflictions; elevates
From worldly care, by contemplating God.
Consider what He is: think what we are:
Look to His works, the heavens, the moon, the stars,
By Him ordained: O philosophic Pride!
Thine optic glass rebukes thee; mark, beyond
Thy natural ken, million on million rise
Of Systems mightier than our own; and far
Above, like dust of stars, that luminous haze;
Illimitable worlds! known but to God!
Lord! what is Man, 'mid Thy creation vast,
Visible and invisible, that Thou

Shouldst have respect for Adam's fallen race;
Children whom Thou hast nourished, sons perverse?
The creatures of the air, and earth, and waters,
Fulfil Thy mission; elements obey Thee;
But Man, cold as the snows, light as the clouds,
Inconstant as the wind, defies his Maker:
Inebriate with blessings, he forgets
The hand that gave; death; and the doom to come.

Such passages are rare, however, in the *Song of Faith*. The poem is not what its title would lead the reader to expect, a glorification of the Faith; it is a piece of instruction on the doctrines and truths of the Faith. Of course, didacticism is not in all cases unworthy of poetry. But "le didactisme finit toujours par écraser le lyrisme, par s'installer à sa place", observes the French critic Robert de Souza[2]). This is what has taken place in a large part of the *Song of Faith:* the didactic element has almost ousted the lyrical element. Truths and convictions are not the true materials for a poet: the element of immutability that they contain conflicts with the nature of poetry. There is a certain inconsistency in the description of truths and convictions "under the influence of the poetical temperament", which inconsistency becomes stronger according as the poet lays more stress on writing for the sake of truth itself. Sir Aubrey himself must have felt that truths and convictions, like reasonings and argumentation, are materials for prose. In the preface he wrote: "It may be urged that the nature of the work (i.e. *A Song of Faith*) is too argumentative for poetry and that, to reason concisely and perspicuously, the simpler construction of prose suits better the exposition of doctrine". As a matter of fact, the most didactic passages in *A Song of Faith* are prose-reasonings in decasyllabics. Take, for instance, the opening lines of Canto VIII:

The Sadducee hath said there is no soul,
Angel, nor Resurrection after Death:
Yet there seems room to doubt that even he
Denied the Being of the Spirit of God:
For he denied not God, and God is spirit.
The Pharisee, by him despised, confessed
A Resurrection; and, in a sense restrained,
Spirits angelical, created Powers.

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[2]) H. Brémond, *La Poésie Pure, Avec „Un Débat sur la Poésie"*; par Robert de Souza. Grasset, Paris; 11th ed. p. 230.

Therefore they erred, not knowing yet the truth
By gospel light revealed: for to the Jews,
Whose law of faith was God in unity,
The mystery profound of Three in One
Was undeveloped. Prophecies were dark,
And faint traditions fell as shadows, cast
Down from unseen Realities, till Earth
Received her Christ; and when He passed away,
Him whom He sent, the Holy Paraclete;
Acknowledged not to outward sense revealed,
But known within the heart, and by His fruits.

and every reader will agree that in this fragment we are far removed from real poetry. *A Song of Faith* contains many passages in the same strain, and the sonnets *The Teaching of Christ, The Christian Church, Prayer, The Primeval Church,* and *The Church Tolerant,* are all of a piece. Still, all these passages and sonnets preserve a faint echo of Milton's music, and Sir Aubrey's poetical temperament has put its stamp on every line he wrote.

Especially in the *Moral Sonnets* is Sir Aubrey's poetic diction an important factor. These poems are distinguished from the purely religious sonnets by their greater force, which in *The Ways of the World,* and in *The Vices of Society,* swells to vehement indignation at the apathy which many of his contemporaries displayed in matters of faith. The contemplative element in the *Moral Sonnets* is generally not deep and the lyrical note not strong, but some of them, like *Though care may sap the mind,* and *There is no remedy for time misspent,* are the expression of true poetic feeling and noble thought.

Of the other groups the *Descriptive* and the *Personal Sonnets* are more attractive than those on *Character and Events* and the *Historical Sonnets.* Although all the sonnets of the last two series were inspired by the poet's great love for England, their character does not differ much from the religious poetry, because in most of them the didactic or the moralizing tendency remains stronger than the expression of patriotism. From the *Descriptive* as well as the *Personal Sonnets* the didactic tone is entirely absent and in them Sir Aubrey's talent for description shows itself in its full force. In the *Descriptive* poems he pictures the places the history of which in connection with Ireland's long contest for independence and religious liberty filled him with pride and made his native soil so dear to him. For Sir Aubrey was very much attached to Ireland. Referring to this patriotic feeling in his father Aubrey, when publishing *Mary Tudor,* wrote: "If the

same loyal and impartial love had been felt both for England and for Ireland by those who during so many years have been bound to both of them, it is possible that those two countries would not have been so slow to understand each other". The aspect of mountain, sea and landscape, too, often roused Sir Aubrey's poetical feelings. He was a great lover of Nature with a keen sense of observation, one who undoubtedly had been taught to "see" on his wanderings with Wordsworth in the Lake District:

> And he, the poet of the age and land,
> Discoursing, as we wandered, hand in hand.

The series of *Descriptive Sonnets* is perhaps the best of the volume, and in some of them observation and description of the scene are felicitously combined, as in *Nightfall, A Summer Evening at Dromoland, Lismore,* and the following poem, *Gougaun Barra,* which we give here as an illustration of Sir Aubrey's descriptive talent:

> Not Beauty which men gaze on with a smile,
> Not Grace that wins, no charm of form or hue,
> Dwelt in that scene. Sternly upon my view,
> And slowly — as the shrouding clouds awhile
> Disclosed the beetling crag and lonely isle —
> From their dim lake the ghostly mountains grew,
> Lit by one slanting ray. An eagle flew
> From out the gloomy gulf of the defile,
> Like some sad spirit from Hades. To the shore
> Dark waters rolled, slow heaving with dull moan;
> The foam-flakes hanging from each livid stone
> Like froth on deathful lips: pale mosses o'er
> The shattered cell crept, as an orphan lone
> Clasps his cold mother's breast when life is gone.

The *Personal Sonnets,* which include four sonnets of Aubrey's mother, constitute the smallest group in the volume. Strictly speaking, only five are really personal: *Easterday,* in which the poet mourns the death of his second daughter (1834), *The Family Picture,* quoted in the preceding chapter, and the three sonnets *My Early Life, To Other Times,* and *Solitude and Society,* which contain a complaint of the unfulfilment of the ideals of his youth. The others were written to the memory of deceased relatives and are mostly meditations on the transitoriness of life. But in all these poems the language is more sincere than in the other series and they are attractive for their sim-

plicity and for the frankness with which the poet describes his impressions of joy and sorrow in life.

In the case of the younger Aubrey it is not necessary to take sides in the question, often raised by critics, from which parent genius in children is inherited, for in Aubrey's mother, too, the poetic sense was highly developed. It is true that she produced very little; but then, talent is not measured by quantity and is often recognisable in a single specimen. Any of Lady De Vere's four sonnets might be taken to show that the lyrical note was strong in her and that she could

> String the orient pearls of poesy
> With pencil dipt in Fancy's rainbow hues

in a graceful and melodious language. Apparently she was, like Sir Aubrey, a great admirer of Petrarch's poetry. In her two sonnets entitled *From Petrarch* the conventional effusion of love, the expression of weariness of life, and longing for heavenly bliss, directly derive from the Italian master, as also their melancholy, but by no means sentimental tone. In the third sonnet, *To A. de V.*, — from which the above lines were quoted — she caught something of the rhetorical strain of her husband's poetry. But the best, perhaps, is the following, *To the Nightingale*, in which she expressed most pathetically, and without undue adornment, the pain she felt in remembering her lost child:

> Ah, once again prolong that thrilling strain,
> That tells of transports now for ever gone;
> Of fruitless sorrows, eager wishes vain,
> Of baseless dreams, and airy hopes o'erthrown.
> Brightly on us the sun of pleasure shone!
> Now its remembered beams but mock my pain;
> Shaping that form I ne'er shall clasp again —
> From my encircling arms for ever flown.
> For She, too, loved to list thy melting note,
> As oft we strayed beneath the moon's pale ray;
> While, scarcely heard, the rivulet remote
> Under the quivering beam in beauty lay.
> Angel adored! on thy blest pinions float,
> O'er my sick heart; and sooth my slow decay!

Wordsworth declared that in his opinion Sir Aubrey's sonnets "were the best of the age"[3]). This is high praise from a man who

[3]) Aubrey de Vere, *Recollections*, p. 130.

had such a lofty conception of the poetic calling and who as a critic "was hard to please"[4]). But of course, it should be kept in view that these words were addressed to Sir Aubrey's son. Wordsworth might appreciate the friendship and admiration of the De Vere family, he could not be blind to the fact that Sir Aubrey's poems often lacked that quality which is essential to poetry of the highest order — namely, imagination. His poems were often full of thought, it is true, but it was meditative rather than imaginative thought. Not that Sir Aubrey lacked the faculty of imagination: he could not have created a single one of the dramatic figures in his plays without it. But his desire to instruct warped his poetic taste and restrained the use of his higher powers. For the strongly didactic tendency which his ardent Christian spirit gave to a large part of his poetry Sir Aubrey is to be numbered with poets like Keble and Richard C. Trench, in whom the Christian spirit was equally strong. With them he shared the fate of being read only by lovers of religion rather than of poetry. No doubt, among the Wordsworthians there are poets who were gifted with a greater talent for description, or with a keener sense for observation, than Sir Aubrey: his own son, Frederick W. Faber, and William Watson, for instance, were decidedly more successful on these points. Only, in stateliness and manliness of style Sir Aubrey was surpassed by none of his contemporaries. His work contains passages, e.g. "For Thou, O Lord, art the great God" (From *A Song of Faith*), which recall the mighty rhetoric of Macpherson's *Ossian's Address to the Sun.* In general Sir Aubrey's poetry resembles the work of the best poets from the second half of the 18th century, like William Cowper, rather than the work of poets of the Tennyson generation.

Although Sir Aubrey's two earlier dramas, *Julian the Apostate* (1822), and *The Duke of Mercia* (1823)[5]), are fine specimens of dramatic art and fully deserve high praise, as indeed they received in the periodicals at the time of their appearance[6]), they are surpassed in excellence of dramatic force and construction by *Mary Tudor.* All

[4]) *Recollections,* p. 130.

[5]) The Duke of Mercia was Edric Streon (d. 1017), who sought his elevation by playing his country into the hands of Canute, but paid for his deed with his life.

[6]) Aubrey had good reasons to believe that one very favourable article on *Julian the Apostate* was written by Hartley Coleridge, then a young man (See *Recollections,* p. 16).

the critics of Sir Aubrey's works are agreed that his last drama is his masterpiece. It was finished in 1844, having been written in five months' time, and was published posthumously by his son in 1847. From the first it was appreciated by some good judges of dramatic poetry, among them being two such different minds as those of Gladstone and Henry E. Manning, who both went so far as to place it next to Shakespeare as regards vividness of character description and mastery of language; but, on the whole, it failed to catch the public attention and lay forgotten for many years. The publication of Tennyson's *Queen Mary* in 1875 called it out of obscurity, and a new edition was issued in 1884 (London, George Bell & Sons). It was dedicated to Lord Monteagle.

The work illustrates the short but momentous period of Queen Mary's reign, her accession, her marriage, and her death, and describes her aspirations and her failure in a time of fierce religious passions and persecution, of civil strife, of foul conspiracy, and of innocent martyrdom —, a vast subject for dramatic description, too comprehensive, it would seem, to be adequately treated within the compass of one dramatic play. The author has divided it into two parts, each forming a complete drama: the first treating of Northumberland's conspiracy to usurp the throne and ending with Jane Grey's death on the scaffold, the second delineating the time of the persecution and of the Queen's marriage with Philip. It ends with the Queen's death.

Queen Mary is the chief character in both parts. In her Sir Aubrey has drawn a truly dramatic figure: a sovereign, religious, virtuous, and essentially good, who loved her people and whose chief aim was to rule them justly and mildly that she might be loved by her subjects; and yet, a queen who had one great fault, — the weakness of losing her self-control in moments of anger and punishing in such a mood the innocent with the guilty, so that on her deathbed she had to confess:

> Something here — in my burning heart and brain —
> Tells me I yet shall be all good men's loathing.

It is this blending of preponderating goodness with some fatal vice that constitutes the strong tragic note in the two dramas. Her very clemency towards the traitors Northumberland and Guildford, Jane Grey's father-in-law, becomes her undoing, for infuriated by Northumberland's plotting with her lover, Exeter, as well as by the news

of Guildford's flight, she not only signs the deathwarrant of Northumberland, but also sends Jane Grey and her young husband to the scaffold. The latter is the fatal decision. For a moment she tries to convince herself that she had a right to take Jane's life:

> I have no thirst for blood; nor yet would shrink
> From shortening earthly life; for what is life
> That we should court its stay? a pearl of price
> In festal days — but mockery to mourners.
> What's life to thee — thy loved one dead — poor Jane?
> What's life to me, by him I loved betrayed?
> I take from thee what is no loss to thee;
> And much infects the realm. Gladly would I
> My life on such conditions sacrifice.
> The time for thy short widowhood is come:
> But ye shall reunite above. For me
> The heart's blank widowhood must be for ever.
> Jane! on thy block the throned Queen envies thee!

In the last line of this soliloquy immediately before Jane's death the Queen's despair is already audible; but soon after, at the moment when she sees Jane executed, and when she realizes the horror of her crime, the note of despair rises into a shriek of guilt and deep remorse. With this terrible scene the first part ends:

> She's gone — I come too late — Forgive me, God!
> Myself I never — never — shall forgive.
> Ha! from yon casement they may mark a signal!
> Hold! Hold! Great God! It is — it is — her head
> That demon lifts and brandishes before me!
> Pah! I am choked — my mouth is choked with blood —
> My eyes — my nostrils — swim in blood — my hair
> Stiffens with blood — the floor is slippery
> With blood — all — blood! Mother and unborn babe —
> Both slain! Mother and child! — The cry of blood
> Rises to heaven — the curse of Cain is launched
> Upon me! Innocent victims! at God's throne
> Already ye bear witness. Mercy — mercy!
> Spare one who knew not how to spare!

The second part, which brings the retribution, is a little inferior to the first. The tragic element in it is less strong, partly because the victim of the Queen's wrath, Cranmer, is less innocent and therefore a less pathetic figure than Jane Grey, partly because there are other factors, wholly beyond the Queen's control, that contribute to

her renewed despair: the fall of Calais, Gardiner's sudden death, and her shame at being neglected by her husband Philip. Her death is caused as much by physical exhaustion as by mental agony. Still, the chief cause of her failing a second time, her relapse into the old sin of losing her self-control in a fit of rage, is as natural as in the first part, and this sequel, when taken by itself, is no less a drama of a very high order.

Sir Aubrey's representation of Mary's life as one great tragedy is as original as it is magnificent. In his conception of her character there is nothing of the cruel, bloodthirsty woman, nothing of the fury raging amid conspiracy and persecution, as she was almost exclusively known to traditional historians. True to the historical estimates of a later date he represents her as a woman who was unfortunate both as a queen and as a wife, and who is to be pitied rather than to be despised. With masterly touches he depicts, in the first part, the struggle in her soul, the contrast between her imperious will inherited from the Tudor race and that one great evil, rashness, which she knows to be within her, against which she prays, but which she cannot overcome; and in the second part the woman, full of passion, who yearned for a little real affection and who could be a loving wife, but whose love is scorned. By this picture of Mary as an unfortunate queen and as an unfortunate wife the author has succeeded in awakening a sympathy for her as deep as the sympathy felt for any of the dramatic woman-characters in the Elizabethan plays, Shakespeare's dramas not excepted. This achievement is the more notable because the reader's sympathy would naturally gravitate towards the sweet and pathetic Jane Grey, who is to some extent Mary's antagonist. But with the native instinct of the true dramatist Sir Aubrey fully succeeded in reconciling the two apparently incompatible conceptions, and his work is throughout what he intended it to be, the tragedy of Mary Tudor.

The Queen by no means monopolizes the attention in the two dramas. Outstanding among the minor characters in the first part are Jane Grey and Northumberland, who live in the reader's memory long after he has finished the whole tragedy, the former as the embodiment of gentleness, innocence, resignation, and self-renunciation, which makes her fate a tragedy in itself, and the latter as the incarnation of villainy, who shows his meanness in every word or thought he utters, as, for instance, in the following passage in which, after he has been pardoned by the Queen, he is heard to mutter:

My title she withholds not. That is well.
And when she lectured of the hope men feel
Who serve in the true Church, her eye had meaning
Beyond her words. True Church? there's food herein
For cautious meditation.

In the second part, too, the most important figures, Gardiner, Cardinal Pole, Fakenham, and Philip, are drawn with a vividness and conciseness that marks the master-hand. With the picture of the contemptible Philip Sir Aubrey has added another hateful character to the gallery of villains in dramatic art, and in Cardinal Pole another impartial estimate to authentic history. Pole is represented as the Queen's only true friend and as Gardiner's antagonist. In the following fragment describing Pole's intercession in behalf of Archbishop Cranmer, the author finely contrasts the Cardinal's aversion to rigorous methods with the severity of the zealous persecutor, Gardiner:

Queen

You named but now the Archbishop. He is safe
In recantation.

Gardiner

He retracts the same.

Cardinal

Not so. Renewed persuasion binds him faster.

Gardiner

I say the recreant shall retract once more,
When urged by hope, not fear.

Cardinal

A weak, good man.

Gardiner

'Twere well to test this instability.
Therefore, upon the ground of his backsliding,
He shall be thoroughly probed.

Queen

No torture, Sir!

Gardiner

None — surely none — save torture of the mind.

Cardinal

Your meaning?

Gardiner

Simply thus. He hath relapsed:
And therefore merits death. With due permission,
I purpose to prepare him for the stake:
The fear whereof will madden him. We, then,
May hint — that if he shall profess repentance,
From the high pulpit of Saint Mary's church,
The doom he hath incurred may be remitted.
Their leader's palinode shall scandalize
His faction sorely. What says my lord to this?

Cardinal

You study the sage Florentine. Your scheme
Is worthy Macchiavelli, and his "Tyrant".

Gardiner

The scholar will break out! You better suit
The cloister than the court. Time presses, Madam.

Cardinal

Madam, you speak not. Then 'tis time I go.

Queen

Desert me not.

Cardinal

Desert not thou thyself.
I have once spoken plainly — twice to speak
Is once too often, when we speak in vain.

This fragment may serve as an illustration of Sir Aubrey's manner. It is quite different from Tennyson's. The Laureate's *Queen Mary* is the work of a poet, not of a dramatist. It is written in that elegant, ornate style which characterizes all his other poetry, but it is not truly dramatic. Lengthy descriptions and conversations, intercalary scenes, such as the dialogue between the two old women (IV, 3), and long speeches as, for instance, the Queen's appeal to the London guilds (II, 2), and Cranmer's recantation (IV, 3), though all poetical in themselves, impede the development of the play, and some of the characters are painted through the comment of others rather than through their own words and acts. The result of this is that most of the figures remain vague and blurred as distant shadows, it is difficult to visualize them as living persons, and they create neither sympathy nor hatred in the reader. *Mary Tudor* is the work of a dramatist. Nowhere does the author stay the progress of the action in his work by indulgence in poetic adornment, nowhere avail himself

of the clumsy method of depicting his *dramatis personae* by description in the mouth of others. His dialogues are always terse, and are marked by the dignified style of his poetry; the characters are painted with the swift strokes of the artist and they act and speak like living persons. They are as much our friends or our enemies as if they were alive. Conciseness, vividness, and definiteness of purpose, these are the principal qualities which distinguish *Mary Tudor* from *Queen Mary* and give it a far greater dramatic power. Indeed, to find an example in earlier English dramatic literature of so high a standard as Sir Aubrey's masterpiece it would be necessary to turn to the best tragedies produced in the Elizabethan age.

b. Religious Poetry

It was not a title, not an estate, not a high place in the realm that Aubrey de Vere's parents bequeathed to their third son. They did better for him: they left him a poet. They had given him a thorough education, moral, scientific, and literary, but they had also cultivated in him a fine taste for poetry — a spiritual heritage which Aubrey valued more than worldly goods. By his own literary endeavours Sir Aubrey had guided his son to the beauty of lyrical expression, had led him to regard Wordsworth's conception of the poetic function with awe, and had shown him by his own example how laurels could still be reaped in dramatic art. Above all, he had impressed upon him the great truth that possession of a strong religious faith is the primary condition of a happy life. Sir Aubrey lived to see in what a rich, fertile soil the seeds of his teaching had fallen. The poems of his son's first two volumes, which appeared simultaneously with the *Song of Faith,* all breathed the deep Christian spirit of his own work, and in the religious hymns, the love songs, the sonnets, and the two dramatic pieces, *The Waldenses* and *The Search after Proserpine,* he saw his own poetic tastes embodied. Indeed, it is under the influence of his father that Aubrey de Vere became a poet with a preference for the spiritual in thought, for song, for dramatic composition, and for Wordsworthian description; and these are the main lines to be followed through his poetical works.

The religious element is as predominant in Aubrey de Vere's poetry as in his father's verse. His poetical career opens with a collection of poems all of them on "sacred subjects", it closes with *Mediaeval Records and Sonnets,* a work of very much the same kind, and several

volumes of religious hymns, sonnets, legends, stories, etc., lie between these two publications to show that the Faith was an inexhaustible source of inspiration for him. So far as the spirit in which these poems were written is concerned, it would not be necessary to distinguish between the Anglican and the Catholic period of his career, for all De Vere's devotional poetry proceeded from the same deeply religious feeling within him. But he himself made the distinction by maintaining that his new religion, so far from taking away anything of what he had ever held to be true, had added to his belief "what seems at once its consummation and its crown"[7]), and he often declared that his conversion had enriched him. This enrichment speaks from the warmer and brighter tone of his Catholic poetry as well as from the wider range of subjects to which his new religion introduced him. Another reason for distinguishing between his Anglican and his Catholic period is that many critics of his religious poetry seem to think that De Vere was exclusively a Catholic poet. It is true that as an Anglican he published only two slender volumes of poetry, but as regards their contents they are by no means negligible.

The religious poems in Aubrey de Vere's first volume are very dissimilar to Sir Aubrey's paraphrases. They are nearly all contemplative and, especially in the hymns, the lyrical note is much stronger than in his father's *Song of Faith*. They are not characterized by that pompous style, that Miltonic melody, from which Sir Aubrey's best passages derive their high poetic quality, although in several of Aubrey's hymns and sonnets, too, a certain stateliness of language, reminiscent of the ecclesiastical air about him, occasionally breaks through. His poems are chiefly borne by their thoughtfulness and the poet's imagination. De Vere loved to meditate on the holiness and salutariness of God's word, on the greatness of Christianity, and on the significance of the Church. He did not, like his father, devote his poetic energies to the explanation of doctrines and truths, but in his hymns he glorified the works of Providence, while in his sonnets he frequently urged men to open their hearts freely to "that Faith by which alone Knowledge is won". Sometimes in meditating on the Church and in representing her emblematically as the bond of union in Christianity the thought of her deep love inspired him to felicitous expression. In *The Church Persecuted* she rose up before him as a penitent "with lifted palms on her wet eyelids pressed"; in the sonnet *That Depth of Love* she appeared to him as a mother "whose meek

[7]) *Memoir*, p. 203.

and tearful eyes have rested on thee ever from thy birth", and in *Faith, Hope, and Charity* he saw her love as a star radiating "a silver path o'er life's dark waters". Under the influence of his poetic imagination Aubrey's sonnets and hymns rise to a higher level than those of his father. The poems, especially the very early ones, cannot always be considered independent work: *Magdalene, On a picture of the Magdalene,* and *St. Mary Magdalene,* apparently owe their origin to Crashaw's *The Weeper*; but there are sonnets in which De Vere's vision is really broad and original, as e.g. in *Universal History, A Church Yard, Beatific Vision of the Earth,* and *On Reading the 'Mores Catholici'*, a sonnet in which Kenelm Digby's conversion to the Catholic Church (1825) is represented as a vain attempt to find the true Church in that communion. In the third volume, *Poems,* the title of this sonnet was changed into *Religious Antiquarianism:*

I saw a wild swan flying to the West,
Following the traces of a sunken Sun.
The sky grew momently more pale; yet on
She urged her indefatigable quest;
Faint crimson lights suffusing still that breast,
Out of whose deep recesses forth she flung
Exhausted wailings of immortal song.
Wind-scattered dirges, psalmody unblest!
Sad Lover of the Past! In vain that flight!
A law there is which bids the earth roll round,
And marvellously marries day and night,
The first and last. Yet drop not to the ground!
Once more the orb thou lovest on thee shall rise,
Far shining from the East of thine abandoned skies.

De Vere's reverence for the Faith of his fathers was extended to everything that reminded him of it; he often chose church-buildings, monasteries, nuns, and religious paintings for his subject and it was a favourite thought of his to view home and family as "een kleene Kerke Christi" (G. Gezelle, *Blyde Kinderen*). It would never have entered his mind to depict a bishop as a frivolous, jealous, and showy man, as Browning did; nor could his pen have written such lines as:

Our dusted velvets have much need of thee:
Thou art no sabbath-drawler of old saws,
Distilled from some worm-canker'd homily.

a fragment from Tennyson's sonnet *To J. M. K.* —. He swelled with patriotic pride when he heard the Anglican liturgy in a church at Rome (*On Hearing the English Liturgy at Rome*). Even his aversion

to the Catholic Church never goaded him to disrespect in his poems, although he did not conceal this aversion. He spoke of her "misguided votaries" as 'friends', and pictured the cardinal in *The Waldenses* as a sympathetic figure. De Vere was tolerant as regards religion; he looked upon all Christians as brothers and he exclaimed in *Conversion:*

> .... neither mourn nor rail
> Because one light, itself unchanging, showers
> A thousand colours on a thousand flowers.

Only, on the Catholic Church he looked with distrust. He feared the 'Latin Church', whose

> Sorceries, Procession, Legend, Rite,
> Sap thus a vigilant Faith with spells of art.
> *(Ritual Excess)*

and he considered her as the arch-enemy of his beloved Anglican Church. De Vere's idea of the tyrannical dominion of Rome in worldly and spiritual matters was one widely spread in the 19th century, and it had never been out of the average Anglican mind since the days of Elizabeth.

Fear of Rome constantly urged De Vere to warn his co-religionists against the danger that threatened from that quarter, and in every papal envoy he saw a representative of the papal power, "with the lust of thrones in his eye". But the tone of the sonnets *Worship of the Blessed Virgin, Ritual Excess, The Papal Empire, Reply of the Anchoret,* and *A Romanist's Question Answered,* is in no way offensive. Even in these sonnets directed against Rome, in which the bogey of the papal power might have been expected to cause a stir in the feelings of a fervent Anglican, the stately dignity with which De Vere wrote all his sacred poetry is rarely broken by a sharp expression.

There is another characteristic in De Vere's devotional poetry — namely, an epic strain, which mingles with the contemplative element. It manifests itself in the narratives *Queen Bertha, King Henry II, The Planets,* and *The Infant Bridal,* in which tales De Vere aimed at illustrating the particular trust of people in the Faith during the Middle Ages. The story of *The Infant Bridal* — a mediaeval tale about a long strife between two nations, in which the two kings were killed, and in which peace was secured by the wedding of the infant son of one of the dead kings to the infant daughter of the other — won some praise from Henry Morley, who gave it as his opinion that "there is a

delicate touch in the Bridal of the infants and their growth together" (*The Nineteenth Century*, Febr. 1878), and from Henry Taylor, who declared that Edmund Spenser, "revisiting earth, would be delighted with this poem"[8]). But it is difficult to concur with these opinions, for De Vere's description is generally cold and lifeless, and the tale gives the impression of a bald chronicle, with a sentimental moral in conclusion. Its subject is indeed about royal children and strife, but this is the only element in it that reminds us of Spenser. De Vere had taken the story from Lord Berner's translation of Froissart's *Chronicles*[9]). Yet, notwithstanding their imperfections, all these early narratives are interesting, because they reveal that epic strain in De Vere's temperament which grew stronger in his Catholic period and which at last developed into his dramatic poetry.

The Catholic element in De Vere's religious poetry is the most important. Not that his conversion made him a better poet. But his new religion inspired him to write about subjects which as an Anglican he would never have attempted or thought of, and by treating them in the true Catholic spirit he became a pioneer in the great work of restoring to England that ancient Catholic art which by the middle of the 19th century had been almost extinct in that country for two centuries, and which, since then, has developed into the glorious pageant of English Catholic literature of to-day. The works that mark him specifically as a Catholic poet are *May Carols, Inisfail, The Legends of St. Patrick, Legends of the Saxon Saints, The Foray of Queen Maeve, Legends and Records of the Church and Empire,* and *Mediaeval Records and Sonnets,* which all of them have a particular interest as the first sign of the revival of Catholic poetry in England.

The principal influence which De Vere's conversion exercised on his poetry was that glorification of the Catholic faith became the chief object of it. A similar change is noticeable in the work of all poet-converts. It is remarkable, however, that they all appear to be drawn, as if by a magnet, to the glorification of the Blessed Virgin Mary and that they give the best part of their powers to this object. Crashaw, Newman, Faber, De Vere, Patmore, Adelaide Procter, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Lionel Johnson, they all came under the spell of Mary's poetical beauty and sang her glory in hymns. In the poetry of Francis Thompson, too, a Catholic by birth, the veneration

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[8]) *The Works of Sir Henry Taylor*, in 5 vols. London, Kegan Paul; 1878. Vol. V, p. 132.

[9]) ibid. note, p. 131.

of the Blessed Virgin is an important element. It seems as if they are all overwhelmed by the grandeur of the Mother of God, and as if devotion to her gave them the warmth which their souls had vainly sought in the Anglican religion.

The mystery of Mary's Virginity and her special function in the work of creation occupied the minds of many men about the year 1850. It was the time when the Catholic Church was making preparations to raise the doctrine of her Immaculate Conception to an explicit dogma. The orthodox Anglicans protested in advance against the doctrine and cried out vehemently against any exaltation of her name, which they stigmatized as idolatry; in Catholic circles the formulation and the significance of the coming dogma were the topic of conversation and correspondence; while those Anglicans who were in sympathy with Rome secretly hoped that in their creed the place would be openly given to Mary which she already had in their hearts. Rome studied the doctrine, and the thought of it was uppermost in the mind of Pope Pius IX when he expressed his wish to De Vere, who was received in audience by him in 1851, that he should write hymns in honour of the Mother of God. In compliance with this wish De Vere composed the *May Carols*.

The volume, published under this title in 1857, consists of a collection of 175 hymns which all bear on Mary, directly by glorifying her greatness as the Mother of God, and indirectly by glorifying the month of May, which the Catholic Church had dedicated to her. From this dedication the volume derived its title of *May Carols*. As De Vere was told, however, that it did not sufficiently indicate the main scope of the volume (the critic Miles, for instance, who contributed *The Poets and the Poetry of the Century* to Mackenzie Bell's *Selections*, 1891, showed that he did not see the connection), he added a second title to the edition of 1897, viz. *Ancilla Domini*.

For prejudiced Anglicans the significance of Mary in the mystery of the Incarnation had always been a delicate point and especially in 1854, when the subject of the Immaculate Conception was acute among them, several fine-spun theories were brought forward. About one of these theories, that of Dr. Wilberforce, the well-known Bishop of Winchester, there is an interesting statement in *Sidelights on the Oxford Movement*, a book published in 1895, and written by an anonymous lady, a convert to Catholicism, under the pseudonym of Minima Parspartis: "The definition of this dogma (the Immaculate Conception) had just been published and there was much discussion

on the subject. The newspapers were uttering blasphemies. Bishop Wilberforce, I think it was, who affirmed that unless Mary had been born in original sin our Lord could not have really taken our human nature, and that the dogma did away with the Incarnation. What he said sounded deep. Some unreflecting people thought it was true. I was glad to observe that St. Augustine and Dr. Pusey did not agree with Dr. Wilberforce. Dr. Pusey indeed did not commit himself very decidedly. The feast of the Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary is retained in the English Calendar, and this no doubt encouraged him to agree with St. Augustine that the Blessed Mother of God should be excepted where there was question of sin" (p. 263). Against such theories as Dr. Wilberforce's De Vere's *May Carols* were directed. He wanted to glorify Mary and at the same time to illustrate her real significance in the mystery of the Incarnation. He considered the Incarnation as the central thought in the work of creation, as the link between the Old-Testament and the New, and as the means by which creation, the angels, man, and the earth, were brought nearer to the Creator. Mary was one with the Incarnation, just as she was one with her Son in the Joyful, the Sorrowful, and the Glorious Mysteries. Together with the promise of the Redeemer Mary's Virginal Maternity had been appointed from the beginning, and in the same way as the whole creation, both material and immaterial, is concentrated in the Incarnation, the whole creation is also reflected in her as the instrument of the Incarnation.

De Vere's view of Mary's function was not new. He had read several works on this subject, e.g. Father Ventura's *Conferences*[10]), delivered at Paris, Father A. Hewit's *Problems of the Age*[11]), and Nicolas' *La Vierge Marie*[12]). From these works he had derived his theory about the elevation of the angels, man, and the earth. But it was his friend Henry Edward Manning who, perhaps, contributed most to the formation of his views. Manning had written in his Diary[13]), May, 1846: "The thought which has been growing in me and justifying the Roman doctrine, is the 'new creation'. All seems

[10]) Published in: *La Raison Philosophique et la Raison Catholique*, Paris, 1852-1859; 3 vols.

[11]) Rev. A. F. Hewit, *Problems of the Age, with studies in St. Augustine on kindred topics.* Originally published in The Catholic World and The American Catholic Quarterly Review, about 1860.

[12]) Auguste Nicolas, *La Vierge Marie*, 1855-1860; 4 vols. (See Kirchenlexicon XII, 668-671).

[13]) See Purcell's *Life of Cardinal Manning*, vol. 1, p. 485.

to hang on this: 1. The Incarnation. — 2. The Real Presence: A. Regeneration; B. Eucharist. — 3. The exaltation of S. Mary and the Saints". The main lines in the Introduction to the *May Carols* are the same as the scheme in Manning's Diary. It is significant also that the volume was dedicated to Manning. De Vere, however, developed the thought much more widely. His contemplation comprises all the important testimonies of Mary and the Incarnation, in Holy Scripture, in the Roman Liturgy, and in the life of the Church. Conceived with such a breadth of vision *May Carols* was a work "unattempted yet in prose or rhyme", and it contained the elements that go to the making of a mighty epic, an epic on the highest mysteries of the Catholic Church.

May Carols is De Vere's most ambitious work. He gave it the form of "a serial poem, a species of composition once common in Italy and among our Elizabethan poets, and most happily revived in England in the present century"; and probably one of the models referred to was Tennyson's *In Memoriam*. Like this poem the *May Carols* are written in four-lined stanzas. But as regards the character of the two poems there is a wide difference. If Tennyson's *In Memoriam* is the Epic of Doubt, De Vere's *May Carols* is the Epic of Truth. In his masterpiece Tennyson gave utterance to his profound grief at the death of his friend Hallam, with which expression of personal sorrow he combined speculations on the unknown, the hereafter, the supernatural, and religious faith. He looked at the problems that presented themselves to him from the standpoint of an agnostic and in this manner created a poem, partly lyrical, partly didactic, which was beautiful indeed as a combination of elegant style and keen thought, but which left in the reader an impression of vagueness and dissatisfaction as to the philosophy propounded in it. The *May Carols* have nothing of the cold gloom that hangs over *In Memoriam* like a pall. They are the expression of a soul that has passed from twilight to light and rejoices to have found that world of reality and truth which it had so long panted for. *May Carols* is a poem of joy, of spiritual joy and happiness. The poet's ecstasy lives in every one of the hymns: whether he exults at the beauty of Nature in the month of May, whether he contemplates with awe the majesty of creation and the deeper meaning of the Divine Mysteries, or whether he commemorates with intense love and devotion the seven dolours of the Mother of God, — it is his joy at seeing everything in its true light that suffuses the whole with a soft glow. In these hymns De Vere has poured out

all the warmth with which the Catholic religion filled his heart. The German critic, Alexander Baumgartner [14]), reviewing De Vere's Catholic poetry said: "Man musz diese Wärme des religiösen Gefühls mit sich bringen, um seine Lieder (i.e. the *May Carols*) ganz und voll zu genieszen"; and indeed, when these poems are read in the light of the religious conviction with which they were composed they have a power to comfort the soul such as no worldly poetry possesses. Every one of them illustrates this, for instance the following, *The Fifth Dolour:*

She stood in silence. Slowly passed
The hours whose moments dropped in blood;
Its frown the Darkness further cast:
She moved not; silently she stood.

No human sympathy she sought:
Her help was God, and God alone;
Not even the instinctive respite caught
From passionate gesture, sigh or moan.

Her silence listened. On the air
Like death-bells tolled that prime Decree
Which bade the Eternal Victim bear
Man's Sin primeval. Let it be!

The Women round her heard all day
The clash of arms, the scoffing tongue:
She heard the breaking of that spray
Whereon the Fruit of Knowledge hung.

Behold the Babe of Bethlehem! Ay!
The Infant slumbered on thy breast;
And thou that heard'st His earliest cry
Must hear His 'Consummatum est'.

This is a poem out of many in the same devotional and meditative strain. De Vere's language is as a rule simple, although there are stanzas and occasionally whole hymns that can vie in exuberance of diction with Tennyson's most ornate sections. There is nothing abstruse in his poems; nor are they disfigured by any obscurity of meaning. Of any mysticism in the real sense of the word there is no question. They are all written with the aim that "one or other of the number might flash into the apprehension (of the reader) a beam

[14]) Alexander Baumgartner S.J., *Stimmen aus Maria-Laach*, vol. 46, (1894), pp. 71-89; 193-206. Reprinted in *Geschichte der Weltliteratur*, Ergänzungsband I-IV: *Untersuchungen und Urteile zu den Literaturen verschiedener Völker*. Gesammelte Aufsätze. pp. 730-762. (Herder, Freiburg; 1912).

of that Truth which conquers all things to itself". But they all glow with the warmth of the poet's devotion to the Blessed Virgin and are born of his love, his awe, his adoration, and his joy. For this expression of religious ardour Newman admired the *May Carols*. He copied some of the hymns, e.g. *In Epiphania* and *Docens*, in his own handwriting and appointed them to be sung at the Oratory each day in May. The painter, Holman Hunt, too, praised the *May Carols* highly, and declared that the hymns had greatly contributed to his better insight into Mary's significance[15]).

Newman's selection, although perhaps most suitable for congregational purposes, did not, however, include those hymns which from the standpoint of poetry are the finest in the volume. All the *May Carols* have more or less a contemplative character, but in some of them De Vere describes the object contemplated with a power of vision which resembles that of the great masters. One of these poems is the following, entitled *Ab Eterno Ordinata:*

Eternal Beauty, ere the spheres
Had rolled from out the gulfs of night,
Sparkled, through all the unnumbered years
Before the Eternal Father's sight:

Truth's solemn reflex — not a Dream —
Created Wisdom's smile unpriced —
Before His eyes it hung, a gleam
Flashed from the Eternal Thought of Christ.

It hung, the unbodied antitype
Of all Creation shapes and sings;
That finite world which Time makes ripe,
Which Uncreated Light enrings.

Star-like within the depths serene
Of that still vision, Mary, thou
With Him, thy Son, of God wert seen
Millenniums ere the lucid brow

Of Eve o'er Eden founts had bent,
Millenniums ere that second Pair
With shame the hopes of man had blent,
Had stained the brightness once so fair.

Elect of Creatures! Man in thee
Beholds that primal Beauty yet;
Sees all that Man was formed to be,
Sees all that Man can ne'er forget!

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[15]) *Memoir*, p. 242-243.

Many attempts have been made by poets to illustrate the idea of eternity, and some of the thoughts on this subject were beautifully worded; but we do not know an example better calculated to suggest the idea of boundless space than the simple, startlingly simple words "it hung" in the second and third stanzas; of limitless time than the phrase "thou of God wert seen"; and of the eternal promise of God's Word than the whole poem. In this hymn prayer has become poetry, poetry has become prayer. It is the thanksgiving of a joyful soul to its Maker, but at the same time the beautiful expression of the vision of a poet who saw the destiny of man, the relation between the spiritual and the material world. The whole theme of the *May Carols* is condensed into these few lines. There are several hymns in the volume not far below this one in excellence, e.g. *Dei Genetrix, The First Dolour, Mater Filii, Tota Pulchra, Stella Maris,* and nearly all the poems in which Nature is described. Some are marked by the poet's depth of thought and contemplation, others, again, by the expression of his profound devotion; but often these two qualities go together, and it is in general by blending religious feeling with poetic vision that De Vere twined a beautiful and many-coloured wreath of Mayflowers for the Blessed Virgin.

The remaining part of De Vere's 'Catholic poetry' is of a quite different kind. In *Inisfail, The Legends of St. Patrick, Legends of the Saxon Saints, The Foray of Queen Maeve,* and *Legends and Records of the Church and Empire,* he recounts the legendary and historical events with reference to the rise of the Catholic faith in Western Europe. Already in his first volumes he had shown a predilection for Antiquity and for the Middle Ages; but while in his Anglican period the pre-Christian civilization of the Greeks and Romans claimed by far the largest part of his attention, this sympathy for pagan Antiquity vanished altogether after his conversion, and from that time forward his thoughts were chiefly occupied in contemplating the development of Christendom. In his studies of ecclesiastical history he had discovered the important part which Ireland and England had had in this development and he thought he saw a deeper meaning embodied in the annals of his native soil and of the land of his ancestors. In *Inisfail, The Legends of St. Patrick, Legends of the Saxon Saints,* and *The Foray of Queen Maeve,* he tried to bring out this meaning in verse form.

Inisfail is "an attempt to represent, as in a picture, the most stormy period of Irish History", the period between the twelfth and the

eighteenth century. The poem consists of songs, hymns, elegies, narratives, ballads, etc., in which various persons and occurrences of that time are commemorated in connection with the Catholic faith in Ireland. In his contemplation of Christendom De Vere had arrived at the conclusion that God had assigned a special function in creation to some nations, "to one the imperial vocation, to another a commercial one, to Greece an artistic one, to Ireland a spiritual one"; and to represent Ireland as the martyr of and the eminent witness to the Faith, was the chief aim of *Inisfail*. From this special function it derived its name: *Inisfail*, according to De Vere, means "The Isle of Destiny". In the indestructibility of Catholicism among the Irish De Vere saw "the Divine Hand". During the six centuries which separate the Norman invasions from the time of Grattan's Parliament (1800) God had sent many trials to the Irish: a period of 'Outlawry', a period of 'Wars and Religion', and a period of 'Penal Laws'; besides, God had dispersed the Irish over the earth like the sons of Israel; but again and again Ireland had borne these visitations heroically and continued to perform its task of upholding the Faith and spreading it. The whole of these six centuries in Irish history were sad: it was the time of suffering; but the moral of it was clear.

The beginning of Ireland's divine mission among the West-European countries lay in the 'Saintly Age'. No people had exhibited such a receptiveness to the new Faith; its heathen inhabitants in the fifth century were without a drop of bloodshed all converted to Christendom. De Vere illustrates this in *The Legends of St. Patrick*, which volume consists of fifteen legends about the life and the missionary work of Ireland's greatest apostle, as they are recorded in *The Tripartite Life of St. Patrick*. This work, which was ascribed by its first editor Colgan (1647) to the 6th century, had been partially translated into English by an eminent Irish scholar, W. M. Hennessy. This translation, which was added as an appendix to M. F. Cusack's *Life of St. Patrick* (1870), was De Vere's source[16]). The introduction to the missionary work is the legend about *The Striving of St. Patrick on Mount Cruachan*, in which the apostle obtains a divine promise that the Faith in Ireland shall be preserved for ever. In *Inisfail* the poet's intention was to show how God gave and kept His promise. The cycle opens with two legends in which, true to Irish tradition, the Celtic poet Oisín, or Ossian, is represented as St. Patrick's contemporary, although, as De Vere affirmed in his preface to the vo-

[16]) See the Preface to the volume, p. XI.

lume[17]), the blind bard had died already two centuries before the coming of the saint. Ossian's prejudice against the new Faith represents the pagan element in the legends.

De Vere did similar work for England in the *Legends of the Saxon Saints,* a series of narratives, in blank verse, derived from the ecclesiastical history of England, from the time of St. Augustine's landing on the isle of Thanet in 597 to the death of St. Bede in 735. The source for the legends and facts from this period was St. Bede's *Ecclesiastical History,* to which work De Vere sometimes kept very close, e.g. in the stories about the kings Oswald and Oswy. Montalembert's *Moines de L'Occident*[18]), too, was often a great help to him. However, it required a strong vision of the conditions among the German tribes in the pre-Christian and early Christian times to give to the legends the meaning which De Vere wanted to bring out. For he viewed the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons as a fulfilment of the Völuspa prophecy in the Poetic Edda that one day the religion of Odin would disappear and be replaced by the Christian Faith. To embody this conception Odin's shadow passes through several of De Vere's narratives.

In a sense it is to be regretted that all these legends awakened nothing in De Vere but thoughts of the greatness of Christianity. In dignified verse he gave a resetting of stories of trial and achievement, of noble passions and tender affections, of loyalty, generosity, and self-sacrifice, always hoping that they might stimulate his countrymen to high ideals of thought and action. Is not this the Heresy of Didacticism pure and simple? In his *Recollections* he declared that "no other poem of mine was written more intensely, I may say painfully, from the heart than *Inisfail*"; and indeed, among De Vere's illustrations of Irish and English history *Inisfail* is the only poem in which his personality as a poet and as a patriot makes itself felt. Ballads such as *The Sea-Kings, Bard Ethel, The Wedding of the Clans,* and *Roisin Dubh* (Little Black Rose), have the true ring of lyrical poetry, animated as they are by his love for Ireland. They are the expression of his endeavour to do for the Irish popular tale what Burns and Scott had done for the Scottish folk-stories. But De Vere's lyricism has neither the fiery enthusiasm of the poets whose contri-

[17]) ibid. p. VIII (De Vere does not mention any ground or authority for his assertion which seems to be universally accepted however).

[18]) Charles de Montalembert, *Moines de L'Occident,* Paris; vol. I-V published 1860-1867; vol. VI-VII in 1877.

butions filled the columns of the Irish periodical, *The Nation,* in the 'forties, nor the touching quality of Burns's deep love for his country. Although the lyrical element in the legends is sometimes stronger than in Scott's poems, it is too often disturbed by other elements, the historical, the political, the religious, and in general the chronicle-like character of the narratives, to call them really Irish or truly popular.

De Vere persisted in this method of illustration even in dealing with such a romantic subject as the story of *The Foray of Queen Maeve.* The legends of which this volume consists all refer to Ireland's Heroic Age, the most glorious part of which ended, according to the legends, before the commencement of the Christian era. It was the time when the warlike Maeve, Queen of Connaught, was supposed to be living; the noble King Fergus MacRoy, who ceded the throne of Uladh (Ulster) to his stepson and rival, Conor Concobar; the Knights of Ulster, called the Red Branch Knights; the Firbolg, Ferdia; the three Sons of Uisnach; the Princess Deirdré; and it was then that the invincible Cuchullain, the Irish Hector and Achilles blended into one, performed his heroic deeds. It was a period which Irish scholars have likened to the Greek Heroic Age, a period of war, of heroism, and of liberty, far greater than the second and third centuries, when King Fionn (Macpherson's Fingal), Oisin, Diarmuid, and Grania were said to have been living, perhaps as great as the time of 'The Seven against Thebes' and of the Argonautic Expedition. This aspect of pagan Ireland, however, seemed to interest De Vere less than the thought that "if Ireland, once converted to the Faith, filled the world with her missions, there must have existed in her previously a thoughtfulness as well as a fearlessness each of which found its way at last into the nobler fields of enterprise".

On account of the exclusively illustrative and historical character of his poems De Vere's part in the Celtic Revival is negligible. This movement, which in the opinion of some critics, e.g. Ernest Boyd (in *Ireland's Literary Renaissance,* London; 1923) had its real beginning in Standish O'Grady's *History of Ireland* (1878), was born of the same love and admiration for Ireland's glorious past as that which marked the poetry of the Nationalists. It deliberately kept away from politics and originally also from glorification of the Catholic religion, being chiefly bent on creating a literature which would be identical in spirit with the descriptive art of the pagan bards. This general principle left free scope to any poet to express in his work

his own conception of art, so that ere long the movement took several directions, which gave to it a certain indefiniteness. There is a great diversity of elements perceptible in the Celtic Revival, and some of them even seem to stand in contrast to each other: mysticism, nature-description, glorification of pagan times, expression of religious ardour, love of liberty, simplicity of style, rhetoric, etc.; but in this apparent lack of unity there is one bond. That is the Irish spirit, which is defined by the character of the people and its traditions, the aspiration to be absolutely national.

De Vere did not possess this spirit and therefore he does not belong to the poets of the Celtic, or Irish, Revival. His nature-descriptions have not that intimate union, almost identification, with the powers of Nature and the mysteries of the fairy world by which Celtic poetry is distinguished from Anglo-Saxon. Passages of strife, of cheerfulness, or of sadness, are rendered by him in the manner of an English poet. One of the most typical instances of his un-Celtic treatment is the episode of the battle between Cuchullain and his friend and old master, Ferdía. The argument of *The Combat at the Ford* is as follows: Queen Maeve sends her herald to Ferdía the Firbolg, requiring him to engage with Cuchullain in single combat. At first Ferdía refuses to fight his pupil, but under the influence of the Princess Finobar he accepts. Ferdía's charioteer sees Cuchullain advancing in his war-car to the Ford, and, rapt by a prophetic spirit, sings his triumph. For two days the ancient friends contend against each other with reluctance and remorse; but on the third day the battle-rage bursts fully forth: and on the fourth, Cuchullain, himself seriously wounded, slays Ferdía by his terrible weapon, the Gae-bulg.

> Then from heaven
> Came down upon Cuchullain, like the night,
> The madness-rage. The Foes confronted met:
> Shivered their spears from point to haft: their swords
> Flashed lightnings round them. Fate-compelled, their feet
> Drew near, then reached that stream which backward fled
> Leaving its channel dry. While raged that fight
> Cuchullain's stature rose, huge bulk, immense,
> Ascending still: as high Ferdia towered
> Like Fomor old, or Nemed from the sea,
> Those shields, their covering late from foot to helm,
> Shrinking, so seemed it, till above them beamed
> Shoulders and heads. So close that fight, their crests
> That waved defiance, mingled in mid air;
> While all along the circles of their shields,

And all adown their swords, viewless for speed
Ran, mad with rage, the demons of dark moors
And war-sprites of the valleys, Bocanachs,
And Banacahs, whose scream, so keen its edge,
Might shear the centuried forest as the scythe
Shears meadow grass. To these in dread response
Thundered far off from sea-caves billow-beat
And halls rock-vaulted 'neath the eternal hills,
That race Tuatha, giant once, long since
To pigmy changed, that forge from molten ores
For aye their clanging weapons, shield or spear,
On stony anvils, waiting still their day
Of vengeance on the Gael. That tumult scared
The horses of the host of Maeve that brake
From war-car or the tethering rope, and spread
Ruin around. Camp-followers first, then chiefs
Innumerable were dragged along, or lay
'Neath broken axle, dead. The end was nigh:
Cuchullain's shield splintered upon his arm
Served him no more; and through his fenceless side
Ferdía drave the sword. Then first the Gael
Hurled forth this taunt; "The Firbolg, bribed by Maeve,
Has sold his ancient friend!" Ferdía spake,
"No Firbolg he, the man in Scatha's Isle,
That won a maid, then left her!" Backward stepped
Cuchullain paces three: he reached the bank;
He uttered low; "The Gae-Bulg!" Instant, Leagh
Within his hand had lodged it. Bending low,
Low as that stream, the war-game's crowning feat,
He launched it on Ferdía's breast. The shield,
The iron plate beneath, the stone within it,
Like shallow ice-films 'neath a courser's hoof
Burst. All was o'er. To earth the warrior sank:
Dying he spake: "Not thine this deed, O friend —
'Twas Maeve who winged that bolt into my heart!"
Then ran Cuchullain to that great one dead,
And raised him in his arms, and laid him down
Beside the Ford, but on its northern bank,
Not in that realm by Ailill swayed and Maeve:
Long time he looked the dead man in the face;
Then by him fell in swoon. "Cuchullain, rise!
The men of Erin be upon thee! Rise!"
Thus Leagh. He answered, waking; "Let them come!
To me what profit if I live or die?
The man I loved is dead!"

De Vere's description of the *Combat at the Ford* is one of the most picturesque and dramatic in *The Foray of Queen Maeve*. The fight

is conceived with a vivid imagination, there is a strong, onward movement in the poem, and parts of it might easily be mistaken for the finest epic verse sometimes of Walter Scott and sometimes of Tennyson. But on the whole he has described his subject with no more enthusiasm or patriotic pride than that with which he recorded the saints' lives in his hagiological sketches. His contemporary and rival, Samuel Ferguson, did not strike the native note either in his poetry; he was perhaps as much a story-teller as De Vere; but Ferguson at least saw and described Celts in his legends and therefore his work is more closely related to the Celtic Revival than De Vere's.

Yet, De Vere's volumes are not wholly without importance for the movement: *Inisfail* appeared four years before Ferguson's *Lays of the Western Gael,* and *The Legends of St. Patrick* were published simultaneously with *Congal,* so that in any case honour is due to De Vere for having first brought the subject-matter in poetical form before the public[19]). It is true that Mangan, Lover, Callanan, Davis, and many other poets had written before him with the patriotism of genuine Irishmen and that their verse contained much of the real Celtic spirit; but De Vere provided the subject-matter in which that spirit could be best expressed. It may be noted that he composed *The Foray of Queen Maeve* from Professor O'Looney's unpublished translation, which he read in manuscript[20]). And as regards the religious element in his legends, he did not remain the only one who tried to glorify the Faith: he was in particular the forerunner of poets like Lionel Johnson and Katharine Tynan, who are perhaps the best exponents of intensely Catholic poetry in Ireland after him.

In general, De Vere's position with respect to the Celtic Revival is analogous to his place in the growth of modern Catholic literature in England: "Walking humbly in the steps of St. Bede", he opened up an almost virgin field of epic poetry. His work as a Catholic poet is not so fully emancipated yet as the purely lyrical work of younger poets, like Francis Thompson and Gerard Manley Hopkins. He had not yet learned to detach his new source of inspiration from the tendencies of Victorianism, and having grown up in an atmosphere of religious inquiry and controversy, he continued to express his poetic feelings in partly lyrical, partly didactic poetry. To contemplate

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[19]) To M. B. Brown's collection of *Historical Ballad Poetry of Ireland* (Longmans, Green and Co, London; 1912) De Vere has contributed no less than 18 poems, more than any other single poet.

[20]) *Recollections,* p. 371.

the Faith in all its aspects was his great joy after his conversion; but, whereas his thoughtfulness was felicitously combined with the exuberance of his emotions in the *May Carols*, it too frequently resulted in emotionless illustration of historical meaning in the other epics, which method tended to flatten the natural charm of stories that have come down to us from the twilight of legend.

c. Secular Poetry

Perhaps the most remarkable feature of De Vere's poetic nature is that it came under the sway of two such antagonistic forces as that of Wordsworth and that of Shelley. So long as his mind was occupied with sacred subjects, these forces had little chance to assert themselves; they are vaguely discernible in his frequent use of the hymn and sonnet form, and in the nature-descriptions of the *May Carols*. But, on the whole, in his religious poetry De Vere lived, as it were, in a world special to himself, a world of spiritual beauty, which neither Wordsworth nor Shelley had ever entered. The proper sphere for the influence of these poets to manifest itself was the domain of secular poetry, or what De Vere called "poetry connected with the ordinary and humbler themes", such as the classics, politics, love, and ethics; and it is in his treatment of these subjects that the main sympathies of his literary education show themselves most clearly.

De Vere's poetic nature was not affected by his admiration for the work of the two poets to the same degree: Wordsworth's influence is the big strand in his poetry, Shelley's rather the thin streak. There can be little surprise at De Vere's indebtedness to Wordsworth, for in general the work of this poet had always appealed as strongly to the son as it did to the father, and as regards poetic tastes and principles the conformity between Aubrey and Wordsworth is even more striking. Nothing need be said here of the close correspondence of their literary sympathies, as this subject is to be dealt with in a subsequent section. The curious point is Shelley. This rebellious spirit, who as a student was expelled from Eton College for having written an essay on *The Necessity of Atheism*, is the last poet whose work one would connect with that of such a devout mind as De Vere's. But in Shelley hatred of evil, love of purity and freedom, and belief in human progress, were as profound as in Wordsworth. He possessed,

says a Dutch critic[21]) of his character and works, "an innate devotion to goodness and virtue", and from his youth "he dedicated himself to the weak and oppressed". These qualities alone would have been sufficient to make him the idol of De Vere. But there was another trait in Shelley's poetic nature, something that was alien to, and almost inconsistent with Wordsworth's temperament — namely, his childlike, romantic spirit. In his moments of poetic fancy Shelley often soared away from the earth to a fairy world of his own creation where he dreamt of beauty unseen, and where he loved to gambol among the stars, or to sport with the winds, the meteors, the clouds, and the mighty powers of Nature. Much of his poetry is the spontaneous outburst of a sensitive soul which, like a child's, expresses its feelings and emotions of joy in pure song. To no man could this childlike purity in Shelley's lyrical verse, this ecstatic dreaminess and effervescent joy, be more fascinating than to De Vere, who was himself a child, a dreamer, and a prophet of joy. His poetic soul responded warmly to Shelley's sense of freedom, his sexless love, and his delight in the unearthly; and it is certainly owing to the influence of Shelley that there is more variety of mood, more of pure lyricism and of passion, in De Vere's poetry than in that of the Rydal Bard. We need only read the following lines to be convinced that the charm of Shelley's verse to which he had been introduced in his youth had not fallen upon idle ears:

> When I was young, I said to Sorrow,
> "Come, and I will play with thee:" —
> He is near me now all day;
> And at night returns to say,
> "I will come again to-morrow,
> I will come and stay with thee".
>
> Through the woods we walk together;
> His soft footsteps rustle nigh me;
> To shield an unregarded head,
> He hath built a winter shed;
> And all night in rainy weather,
> I hear his gentle breathings by me.

Swinburne, a poet whose general aim and manner were altogether different from De Vere's, praised this lyric warmly. He even went so far as to say that, in his opinion, it was "the one lyrical poem in

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[21]) J. de Gruyter, *Shelley and Dostoievsky;* English Studies, Shelley Centenary Number; Vol. IV, No. 4, August, 1922. Swets & Zeitlinger, Amsterdam.

our language not written by Shelley yet possibly and even likely to be taken for Shelley's by a perfect judge and faithful student of the supreme lyric poet of England"[22]); and Swinburne as a critic was not one to be easily mistaken in his judgment of Shelleyan poetry, although he was apt to be too enthusiastic. Yet, the song, short as it is, deserves much praise for its lightness and elegance of movement, and it is worthy of being placed by the side of Swinburne's own best lyrics. Another dainty song, written by De Vere in his youth, is *Love Laid Down its Golden Head (1843)*, a lyric which also seems to have captured Swinburne's admiration. The latter tried a similar impersonation of 'Love' in *Love Laid his Sleepless Head (1866)*, but the irregular measure of this poem — especially the harsh spondee at the opening may be noted —, as well as the frequent return of the word "And" at the beginning of a line, make it less sweet and less melodious than De Vere's.

Equally suggestive of the Shelleyan influence is *The Search After Proserpine*, a masque which has for its subject the kidnapping of Ceres' daughter by Pluto, and her mother's search for her. With this story the poet has interwoven its symbolical meanings as an illustration of "that brief and unexpected return of fine weather which occurs so often just before Winter closes in", and of the great mystery of Joy and Grief, of Life and Death, "which pressed so heavily on the mind of Pagan Greece". The masque is conceived in the classical spirit and assumes here and there the philosophic garb of Wordsworth's poetry, but it derives much of its charm from Shelleyan lightness and abandon. Especially the Bacchanalian scenes and the songs of the water-nymphs are fine. Hear the Fauns singing in praise of Bacchus:

> Hour by hour great Bacchus nurses
> The wide wreaths of his anadem:
> In him they meet; and he disperses
> Himself o'er all the world in them.
> The mountains of all seas and lands,
> He grasps them in his thousand hands!

or the Sicilian Nymphs singing in answer to the Hours and Zephyrs:

> Numbers softer than our own
> And in happier circle running
> Like Flora's crown or Venus' zone

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[22]) Cp. Swinburne, *Miscellanies;* Chatto and Windus, London; 1886, p. 112.

They are braiding in their cunning.
All the God-thronged air is glowing
With a ferment of delight;
All the flowers in rapture blowing
Every moment swell more bright
And higher round the pale stems clamber
In vermilion wreaths or amber.

The whole poem suffers a little from too great elaboration, but, despite this defect, Walter Savage Landor recognized in the masque that same Greek spirit which he himself had so often tried to embody in his own poetry. He extended an enthusiastic welcome to the poem, which in his eyes heralded a return to the ancient Greek art, and addressed the following lines to the young poet, whom he regarded as his worthy successor:

Welcome who last hast climbed the cloven hill
Forsaken by its Muses and their God!
Show us the way; we miss it, young and old.
Roses that cannot clasp their languid leaves,
Puffy and colourless and overblown,
Encumber all our walks of poetry.
The satin slipper and the mirror boot
Delight in pressing them; but who hath trackt
A Grace's naked foot amid them all?
Or who hath seen (Ah! how few care to see!)
The close-bound tresses and the robe succinct?
Thou hast; and she hath placed her palm in thine;
Walk ye together in our fields and groves.
We have gay birds and graver; we have none
Of varied note, none to whose harmony
Late hours will listen, none who sings alone.
Make thy proud name yet prouder for thy sons,
Aubrey de Vere! Fling far aside all heed
Of that hyaena race whose growls and smiles
Alternate, and which neither blows nor food
Nor stern nor gentle brow domesticate.
Await some Cromwell who alone hath strength
Of heart to dash down its wild wantonness
And fasten its fierce grin with steady gaze.
Come reascend with me the steeps of Greece
With firmer foot than mine; none stop the road,
And few will follow; we shall breathe apart
That pure fresh air, and drink the untroubled spring.
Lead thou the way; I knew it once; my sight
May miss old marks; lend me thy hand; press on
Elastic is thy step, thy guidance sure.

These lines with their reference to De Vere's pamphlet *English Misrule and Irish Misdeeds*, in which he took up a favourable attitude towards his Irish countrymen, were written by Landor in 1848 [23]), as is stated by Henry Taylor, who inserted them in his *Autobiography*, vol. 1, pp. 307-308. De Vere wrote several more poems the classical spirit of which might have delighted Landor, e.g. *Sunrise* (afterwards called *The Sun-God*), in which he gave a finely chiselled picture of Apollo; *The Antigone of Sophocles*, a poetic vision of the moment when the great dramatist's conception of his masterpiece took shape; and *Lines Written under Delphi*, a poem partly descriptive, partly meditative, in which the poet mused on the fallen greatness of Greece. But in the remaining part of his poetical career De Vere did not fulfil Landor's expectations: his conversion turned his poetic tastes into other channels and the classical spirit faded from his poetry.

It is to be regretted that De Vere so seldom drew his inspiration from Shelley's poetry. Early in the 'fifties he wrote to Sara Coleridge: "I have outgrown Shelley, though not at all my admiration for his wonderful genius" [24]). If he had been a better judge of his real powers he might have given us a volume of such sweet lyrics as *When I was young I said to Sorrow* and *Love laid down its Golden Head*. Not that his imitations of Shelley were always successful. In his song *The Poetic Faculty* he took *The Cloud* as a model, but his imitation of its rhythm is hardly more than a profanation of this glorious, melodious dream, notwithstanding the many ideas and phrases he borrowed from it. But one is apt to forget this failure when reading the *Ode to an Eolian Harp*, De Vere's third attempt at imitation of Shelley, this time of the *Ode to a Skylark*. It is again a beautiful lyric, though in need of compression, a poem in which De Vere — he was the lucky possessor of an Eolian harp — is the harp-player who sings the thoughts awakened in him by the soft, sweet, melancholy strain of the music. Some of his poems also bear signs of the influence of other poets, more or less akin to Shelley, for instance of Keats, Burns, Tennyson, and even of his countryman Thomas Moore. But he is at his best when he sings to his own tune. Several of the songs move with a lightness and easy grace unknown in those later poems intended to reveal the processes by which a human soul becomes regenerate.

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[23]) The poem, entitled *To Aubrey De Vere*, occurs in *The Works and Life of Walter Savage Landor*, 8th vol.: *Miscellaneous Poems*, p. 244; London, Chapman and Hall, 1876.

[24]) *Recollections*, p. 199.

Now it is the bantering sportiveness that delights us in songs like *Who told you, Girl, that you are fair?*, and *Give me back my Heart, Fair Child;* now we are touched by the tender pathos of a dirge like *We raised our Heads to look on thee,* a poem on the death of his father; by the sweetness of such a beautiful lyric as *Softly, o midnight hours,* or by the consoling influence of *Forever Gentle, Sweet, and Lone;* and occasionally the poet shifts his melody to a minor key, as in *Dignity of Sorrow.* All these poems have rightly been placed by selectors of De Vere's poetry in the first pages of their collections.

De Vere does not seem to have been aware that his poetic nature was essentially lyrical in quality. He certainly did not realise that he would have stood a far better chance of becoming an Irish Burns if he had given all the time spent in his later years on the composition of indifferent legends, to the writing of songs. And yet, even in his happiest lyrical moods he did not always contrive to keep the two antagonistic tendencies in him apart, so that sometimes he must needs conclude a fine, purely lyrical poem with a few lines of the Wordsworthian preacher, at the imminent risk of spoiling thereby the effect of the whole. The following poem, *Death in Childbirth,* is an example of this habit of his —

> Sweet Martyr of thine Infant and thy Love,
> O what a death is thine!
> Is this to die? Then love! henceforth approve
> This, this of all thy gifts the most divine.
> Grave she needs not: Matrons, cover
> Her white bed with flowers all over;
> With the dark, cool violets swathing
> A full bosom mother-hearted;
> Under lily shadows bathing
> Brows whose anguish hath departed.
> Life with others, Death with thee
> Plays a grave game smilingly —
> O Death not Death! Through worlds of bliss
> The happy new-born Soul is straying!
> O Death not Death! Thy Babe in this
> An Angel on the earth, is playing!

This lyric is full of pathos and the charm of it is enhanced by the thought that the aristocratic poet wrote it on the occasion of such a death in the cottage of one of his father's field-labourers; but with that ill judgment so characteristic of all the Early Victorian poets, De Vere appended to an almost flawless lyric four poor lines of the Wordsworthian pattern, and nearly ruined the effect by doing so.

This is an error of much the same character as Tennyson committed when he tagged on three very prosaic lines to the beautiful dramatic close of *Enoch Arden.*

Of a very different order are De Vere's poems written in connection with the Irish famine. They show an aspect of his poetical temperament quite unexpected in such a calm and equable nature as his, a bitterness of mood and a violence of temper unknown in Wordsworth's poetry, and rare even in Shelley's. De Vere felt the same deep love both for England and for Ireland as his father. In his pamphlet of 1848, *English Misrule and Irish Misdeeds,* he had warmly recommended measures to be taken by England in order to come to a better understanding with the sister-island, and for some time he had hopes that his proposals would be accepted. But at the end of 1848, when he saw that the measures failed to help, his trust in England's readiness to cooperate was severely shaken, and such was his disappointment that the bitterness excited in him by England's unwillingness seemed incompatible with his hope of reconciliation between the two countries. In his poems he did not speak any more of "love for the land of my ancestors", and we should be inclined to believe that he had abandoned the idea of a union, were it not for a faint echo of his book in some lines. The poet had turned away from England. Its apathy dispirited him and took away from him the optimism with which he had begun his pamphlet. Not a single note of joy or cheerfulness relieves the gloom that hangs over *Desolation of the West* and *After one of the Famine Years,* two poems in which he described how Ireland, at one time so beautiful, had gradually changed into a desert. The only choice left to its inhabitants was to found a new Ireland in distant regions. The grandeur of such a prospect rose before De Vere's mind when he bade a last farewell to the emigrants in *Colonization* (1848); but the first impression was one of bitterness: Ireland saw her children depart. The age-long struggle with England passed before his mind's eye and he saw that the dreadful consequences of the famine had caused no alteration in the attitude of that country. With a violence of passion which recalls John Mitchel's mood (see below), he stigmatized England as a second Cain in the first of the five sonnets of which *Colonization* consists —

> England, thy sinful past has found thee out!
> Washed was the blood-stain from the perfumed hand:
> O'er lips self-righteous smiles demure and bland,
> Flickered, though still thine eye betrayed a doubt,

When round thy palace rose a people's shout —
"Famine makes lean the Helot's helpless land".
What made them Helots? Gibbet, scourge, and brand,
Plaguing with futile rage a faith devout.
England! Six hundred tyrannous years and more,
Trampling a prostrate realm, that strength out-trod,
Which twenty years availed not to restore[25]).
Thou wert thy brother's keeper — from the sod
His life-blood crieth. Expiate thou that crime,
Or bear a branded brow throughout all time.

Also in *The Irish Celt to the Irish Norman,* in *Ireland,* 1851, and in *An Irish "God save the Queen",* a tone of bitterness and resentment dominates; Ireland was on the verge of ruin and the poet could not speak comfort to his country. And yet the political element in these poems, which have Emigration, Colonization, or the hostile attitude of England for their subject, is too strong to consider them really great poetry. But there were moments when De Vere could detach himself from the political contest and could see the famine as a tragedy; and in these moments his poetical powers showed themselves at their best, for they lay precisely there, in the dramatic. In *Widowhood* (1848), which represents Ireland as a widow who has lost all that is dearest to her on earth, we feel already the heightened effect of De Vere's plastic power, just as his talent for nature-description communicates a peculiar charm to *Desolation of the West;* but we feel at the same time that the poet can do greater things, that he is capable of producing a poem in which these two qualities are combined with his deep love for Ireland into a majestic whole. De Vere accomplished this in *The Year of Sorrow.*

This poem, the most imposing of De Vere's poems on the famine, is an elegy on the terrible condition of Ireland in 1849. It consists of 52 stanzas, the four seasons of the year being pictured in groups of 13 stanzas. In itself 1849 was not so fatal as the two preceding years, but it stood for all the mischief wrought in the whole famine period. At the end of this year it was possible to survey the havoc, for by that time the famine had ceased to rage, save in a few districts. How 'Green Erin' was changed! On De Vere it made the impression of one vast cemetery, in which the dead were awaiting burial. In the first months of the year 1849 there were still a few living beings who had survived the terrible winter of 1848, but they were to be looked for in caves where they had sought shelter against

[25]) Grattan's Parliament (1782-1800).

the cold. Their turn would soon come. Ireland had become an island of death. But no, Death had not succeeded in bringing everything under its sway: the rich, fertile soil of Ireland never died. At the entrance of the new year it was again full of fresh, new life, and was the first to obey the summons of Spring to joyful renewal. Nature decked itself out with a wealth of flowers in valleys and on mountain-slopes, and invited everybody to forget the distress of the preceding winter. But the Irish could not hail the springtime with joy. They had no food and Spring did not supply them with it. It was only the precursor of the season of the potato-crop and what was the summer of this year going to bring forth? With many misgivings in their hearts they looked forward to the time of harvest and stared gloomily at the useless display of vernal splendour —

SPRING

1.

Once more through God's high will and grace,
Of hours that each its task fulfils,
Heart-healing Spring resumes its place; —
The valley throngs, and scales the hills,

2.

In vain. From earth's deep heart o'ercharged,
The exulting life runs o'er in flowers;
The slave unfed is unenlarged:
In darkness sleep a Nation's powers.

The birds, the flowers, and the herbs welcomed spring; but not so the poet, for he, too, had felt the scourge of the famine. Tears of emotion welled into his eyes when he saw so much beauty in the midst of death and when he beheld the pleasure-garden into which Ireland had been transformed. The warm air had also heralded the coming of spring to the country people and they ventured to leave their shelters. But these children of Nature, whose only joy in life had always been the beauty of their country, did not first of all turn their eyes to the glory of their surroundings. Their first glance went up to God to thank Him for the preservation of their lives and for the coming of springtime. For they were above all children of God, who had a thousand-year-old faith in them. They knew that God was the Master of all and they thankfully accepted the new year (although it might be their last) because it had been sent to them "through God's high will and grace".

11.

From ruined huts and holes come forth
Old men, and look upon the sky!
The Power Divine is on the earth:
Give thanks to God before you die!

12.

And ye, O children worn and weak,
Who care no more with flowers to play,
Lean on the grass your cold, thin cheek,
And those slight hands, and whispering say:

13.

Stern Mother of a race unblest,
In promise kindly, cold in deed; —
"Take back, O Earth, into thy breast,
"The children whom thou wilt not feed".

Summer has come and the whole northern hemisphere basks in the delicious warmth of the sun. But in Ireland the summertime does not bring joy. For the fifth time the potato-blight touches the fields, which are blackened by the disease within a few days; now the last gleam of hope of the Irish peasant is gone:

5.

But thou, O land of many woes!
What cheer is thine? Again the breath
Of proved destruction o'er thee blows,
And sentenced fields grow black in death.

6.

In horror of a new despair
His bloodshot eyes the peasant strains,
With hands clenched fast, and lifted hair,
Along the daily-darkening plains.

7.

"Why trusted he to them his store?
"Why feared he not the scourge to come?
"Fool! turn the page of History o'er —
"The roll of Statutes — and be dumb!"

What is the use of arguing about the question whether the Irish peasant did wisely to rely every year on an abundant potato-crop, De Vere asks? His fate was sealed and it seemed as if Hermes himself had descended to the earth to proclaim Heaven's last decree to Ireland:

9.

Lo! as the closing of a book,
Or statue from the base o'erthrown,
Or blasted wood, or dried-up brook,
Name, race, and nation, thou art gone.

AUTUMN.

For the Irish the year had come to an end when autumn began. What was all this autumnal splendour to them? What did they care about the beauty of Nature or the magnificence of sunset? The year had taken away from them all they possessed; from some their steadfastness of faith, which they had abandoned yielding to force or to fair words; from many the zest for labour; from the peasants their potatoes, and from all of them the Indian corn. They could but lie down and die, for the Union had not redeemed its specious promises:

1.

Then die, thou Year — thy work is done:
The work ill done is done at last.
Far off, beyond that sinking sun
Which sets in blood, I hear the blast

2.

That sings thy dirge, and says — "Ascend,
And answer make amid thy peers,
(Since all things here must have an end,)
Thou latest of the famine years!"

The winter-cold completed the work of the famine. Like a pall the snow spread over all the people and the whole of the island. It came not with violence and brute force, like an enemy, but gently and peacefully, like a friend. Death, at other times so cruel, now seemed to be satisfied too, and did not want more victims. The whole island now belonged to him and the burial of all Ireland could take place. But the Irish priests could not assist in it, for there was none left. Death had come in person to conduct the burial. In silence the ceremony took place and the elements were bidden not to disturb the stillness:

WINTER

1.

Fall, snow, and cease not! Flake by flake
The decent winding-sheet compose.
Thy task is just and pious; make
An end of blasphemies and woes.

2.

Fall flake by flake! By thee alone,
Last Friend, the sleeping draught is given:
Kind nurse, by thee the couch is strewn —
The couch whose covering is from heaven.

3.

Descend and clasp the mountain's crest;
Inherit plain and valley deep:
This night, in thy maternal breast,
A vanquished nation dies in sleep.

4.

Lo! From the starry temple gates
Death rides, and bears the flag of peace:
The combatants he separates;
He bids the wrath of ages cease.

5.

Descend, benignant Power! But O,
Ye torrents, shake no more the vale:
Dark streams, in silence seaward flow;
Thou rising storm, remit thy wail.

6.

Shake not, to-night, the cliffs of Moher,
Nor Brandon's base, rough sea! Thou Isle,
The rite proceeds! From shore to shore,
Hold in thy gathered breath awhile.

7.

Fall, snow! in stillness fall, like dew,
On temple's roof, and cedar's fan;
And mould thyself on pine and yew;
And on the awful face of man.

8.

Without a sound, without a stir,
In streets and wolds, on rock and mound,
O, omnipresent Comforter,
By thee, this night, the lost are found!

9.

On quaking moor, and mountain moss,
With eyes upstaring to the sky,
And arms extended like a cross,
The long-expectant sufferers lie.

10.

Bend o'er them, white-robed Acolyte!
Put forth thine hand from cloud and mist,
And minister the last sad rite,
Where altar there is none, nor priest.

11.

Touch thou the gates of soul and sense;
Touch darkening eyes and dying ears;
Touch stiffening hands and feet, and thence
Remove the trace of sin and tears.

12.

And ere thou seal those filméd eyes,
Into God's urn thy fingers dip,
And lay, 'mid eucharistic sighs,
The sacred wafer on the lip.

13.

This night the Absolver issues forth:
This night the Eternal Victim bleeds:
O winds and woods, — O heaven and earth!
Be still this night. The Rite proceeds!

We have reproduced *Winter* unabridged, because it is a unity, and because it illustrates, more than the three other seasons in the poem, De Vere's poetical power. We do not imply that *Spring, Summer,* and *Autumn* are unimportant; they are each an indispensable part of the whole and contribute in their own way to the deeper effect of *Winter.* But because of their introductory character they are not an end in themselves, they lack unity and depict more than one scene. In *Spring* and in *Autumn* the personality of the poet obtrudes itself and in *Summer* the description of nature in the northern hemisphere checks the progress of the action. *Winter* is free from digressions and quite impersonal. It is the crowning completion of the three other parts and derives its effect from one action: the burial of Ireland. The vision of such a close of the famine-tragedy is noble and original. With a few touching strokes De Vere pictures in *Winter* the resignation with which the Irish died, their full submission to the will of God, and their firm belief in a happier other life. Such was the Irish conception of life. Hope has always been a characteristic feature in the Irish people; the Irish coat of arms speaks of melancholy, but it also speaks of hope, and no Irish emigrant dedicates his songs to *Dark Rosaleen* without expressing in them his hope of better times.

In interpreting this characteristic De Vere made *The Year of Sorrow* an Irish poem. *Winter* is the final act of a terrible tragedy; it pictures the huge ceremony of the burial of a whole people, which is described by the poet with a strong sense of the graphic. The representation of Death as the priest who conducts the burial, the silent work of the snow spreading over buildings, trees, and "the awful face of man", the silence of the waters and the wind, impart to the scene the vividness of actuality and intensify its impressiveness. In sharp contrast with the hard struggle of the Irish peasant in daily life De Vere sets off the comforting tenderness with which Death comes to the dying, to whom the poet holds out the prospect of heavenly glory as the reward of a life of martyrdom. Not all stanzas of *Winter* are without blemish. Some of the rhymes are not quite correct, and it seems as if especially stanza 6 smells of the lamp; but these blemishes affect the whole poem little, and it is certainly not too much to say that *The Year of Sorrow* may be reckoned among the finest elegies in the English language.

But De Vere surprises us with still greater achievements in another form of song — namely, the Ode. This form was originally used for the expression of a lyrical mood, especially of passion or enthusiasm; it was, as an eminent connoisseur of poetical forms, Theodore Watts-Dunton, has called it: "the voice of Poetry like a fine frenzy". But Wordsworth, who was not a man of 'frenzy', showed in his odes that thoughtfulness was not incompatible with the lyrical element. The *Vernal Ode,* the *Ode on Intimations of Immortality* and the *Ode on Duty,* are among his best poems, and are only comparable in beauty to two other odes, to which the poet, however, gave the modest title of *Lines Composed a few miles above Tintern Abbey,* and *Yarrow Visited,* probably because they open without an address. With De Vere the ode was as often the vehicle for the expression of his poetical moods as with Wordsworth, and sometimes, especially in his later ones, e.g. in the ode *To an Eolian Harp,* the *Ode to Coleridge,* and the *Ode to Ireland,* he used the form with considerable success. But he rose to his most poetic heights in the *Ode to the Daffodil* and the *Autumnal Ode.*

The first is a song of welcome to the earliest flower in spring, and was written in answer to Henry Taylor's remark that De Vere never described nature. It was inspired by Wordsworth's *Vernal Ode,* but the subjects are a little different; for whereas the latter song deals with April, the month in which "all the fields with freshest

green are dight", De Vere's poem treats of "unbelovéd March", when "all the uncoloured world is like a shadow-limned engraving". It is not yet the season for Wordsworth's "vagrant bee"; the poet has symbolized the coming of new life by the daffodil, which he apostrophizes as:

> Herald and Harbinger! with thee
> Begins the year's great jubilee!
> Of her solemnities sublime
> A sacristan whose gusty taper
> Flashes through earliest morning vapour.

The poem is a splendid description of nature, a picture of that awakening landscape which is still colourless in its scanty dress and only just freed from the grip of winter. But the poet's eye, which, like his father's, has learned to "see" under the guidance of the master, detects already the coming of new life and roves with pleasure from "the gorse-bush, slowly overcrept with gold", to the riverbanks, where "new furred, the reed leans its green javelin level in the air". In this poem De Vere blends a fine Shelleyan fantasy with the graver dignity of Wordsworth's poetry, the former quality dominating in the light colouring of the coming spring and the blithe hope of a brilliant future, the latter speaking more particularly from the solemn passages in which the poet reflects upon the past months. The alternation between the two tendencies gives to the poem that atmosphere of indecision, that wavering between brightness and gloom, which is so characteristic of that season. The ode suffers from being somewhat overcharged; it would bear condensing, and the typical farewell cry of De Vere in its last two lines would not have been a great loss if it had been omitted, but still, the close is a splendid piece of poetic imagination:

> Child of the strong and strenuous East!
> Now scattered wide o'er dusk hill bases,
> Now massed in broad illuminate spaces;
> Torchbearer at a wedding feast
> Whereof thou mayst not be partaker,
> But mime, at most, and merrymaker;
> Phosphor of an ungrateful sun
> That rises but to bid thy lamp be gone: —
> Farewell! I saw
> Writ large on woods and lawns to-day that law
> Which back remands thy race and thee
> To hero-haunted shades of dark Persephoné.
> To-day the Spring has pledged her marriage vow:
> Her voice, late tremulous, strong has grown and steady:

To-day the Spring is crowned a queen: but thou
Thy winter hast already!
Take my song's blessing, and depart,
Type of true service — unrequited heart.

Even finer than the *Ode to the Daffodil* is the *Autumnal Ode*. This poem, written in 1867 and dedicated to his sister Ellen, falls into two parts, as defined by the author's intention to give "a description of autumn corresponding with the description in the *Ode to the Daffodil;* over and above this descriptive part, it is intended to maintain a great truth, the converse of that so magnificently put forth by Wordsworth in his glorious *Vernal Ode*. He affirms that the cyclical revolutions of Nature make time an image of eternity, and might tempt the angels down among earth's 'sweet vicissitudes to range'. But the converse is no less true — namely, that man was made for eternal things, and that consequently the most beautiful changes have in them something unsatisfactory to him"[26]). This intention of De Vere to illustrate in his poem "a great truth" by the teaching of Nature gives us a general idea of the Wordsworthian method: the poet goes into the country, is impressed by the beauty of Nature, and becomes inspired with high thoughts concerning man's existence and destiny.

The first half of the poem is the counterpart of the *Ode to the Daffodil*. In it the poet gives a picture of dying nature, and his description of it is as admirable as that of coming spring in the other ode. Again there is in it that happy mixture of Shelleyan lightness and Wordsworthian composure which gives to the *Ode to the Daffodil* its peculiar charm. It is Shelleyan, where the poet sings of

The nymphs that urge the seasons on their round
... ...
They that drag April by the rain-bright hair,
Though sun-showers daze her and the rude winds scare,
O'er March's frosty bound,
They by whose warm and furtive hand unwound
The cestus falls from May's new-wedded breast —

or of the ruin worked among the trees:

Yon poplar grove is troubled! Bright and bold
Babbled his cold leaves in the July breeze
As though above our heads a runnel rolled:
His mirth is o'er; subdued by old October
He counts his lessening wealth, and, sadly sober,
Tinkles his querulous tablets of wan gold.

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[26]) Henry Taylor's *Correspondence*, edited by Edward Dowden; Longmans, Green & Co, London, 1888. pp. 282-283.

It is Wordsworthian, where he describes with minute and careful observation the last glories of summer and the first indications of approaching death in nature. This time, however, De Vere did not relapse into the fault of the *Ode to the Daffodil:* there is not a single line one would willingly miss in the description, for each pictures some sound, colour, or change characteristic of the autumnal landscape in its state of desolation. It is the stillness of the scene which impresses the poet most. At the outset he could hail the blackbird with gladness, but even

> The latest of late warblers sings as one
> Who trolls at random when the feast is over.

Gradually a note of sadness creeps into the poet's song as he advances on his walk through the country, and at last, when he bends his steps towards the woods, we feel the inevitableness of the meditative mood that is coming over him. This is where the second part of the poem begins.

The subject now changes: the landscape fades away and thoughtfulness takes the place of description. Under the influence of the sacred stillness of the forest a deep feeling of awe seizes the poet, and memories of his deceased relatives, in which joy and grief are mingled, enter his mind. Slowly his vision widens: thoughts of the dead and the hereafter rise before him, thoughts which he had tried to express in his earlier poetry, so that it seems as if in stanzas X and XI his best sonnets, *Human Life, Beatific Vision of the Earth,* and *Universal History,* are incorporated; until at last his poetic imagination ascends to the mighty pageant of the pure souls' entrance into Heaven and he pictures to the reader the splendour of the Heavenly City in the magnificent, organ-rolling close:

> Hark! the breeze increases:
> The sunset forests, catching sudden fire,
> Flash, swell, and sing, a million-organed choir:
> Roofing the West, rich clouds in glittering fleeces
> O'erarch ethereal spaces and divine
> Of heaven's clear hyaline.
> No dream is this! Beyond that radiance golden
> God's sons I see. His armies bright and strong,
> The ensanguined Martyrs here with palms high holden,
> The Virgins there, a lily-lifting throng!
> The Splendours nearer draw. In choral blending
> The Prophets' and the Apostles' chant I hear;
> I see the city of the Just descending,

With gates of pearl and diamond bastions sheer.
The walls are agate and chalcedony:
On jacinth street and jasper parapet
The unwaning light is light of Deity,
Not beam of lessening moon or suns that set.
That indeciduous forestry of spires
Lets fall no leaf! those lights can never range:
Saintly fruitions and divine desires
Are blended there in rapture without change.
Man was not made for things that leave us,
For that which goeth and returneth,
For hopes that lift us yet deceive us,
For love that wears a smile yet mourneth;
Not for fresh forests from the dead leaves springing,
The cyclic re-creation which, at best,
Yields us — betrayal still to promise clinging —
But tremulous shadows of the realm of rest:
For things immortal Man was made,
God's Image latest from His hand,
Co-heir with Him Who in Man's flesh arrayed
Holds o'er the worlds the Heavenly-Human wand:
His portion this — sublime
To stand where access none hath Space or Time,
Above the starry host, the Cherub band,
To stand — to advance — and, after all, to stand!

And so, it was Wordsworth who in De Vere's best poetry triumphed over Shelley! For the *Ode to the Daffodil* and the *Autumnal Ode* are undoubtedly De Vere's masterpieces, and nobody who is at all acquainted with the characteristics of Wordsworth's poetry need be in doubt of what kind are the qualities which give to the *Autumnal Ode* and the *Ode to the Daffodil* their high poetic beauty. It is true that the streak of Shelleyan lightness which runs through both poems lends them a special charm, but on the whole no poet but a Wordsworthian could have written such odes. Keats's ode *To Autumn* is of a quite different character, and so is Coleridge's rhetorical poem *On an Autumnal Evening.* Perhaps the subjects of these poems are too far removed from that of De Vere's ode to justify a comparison as to their qualities, but at any rate the *Autumnal Ode* is truer, more autumn-like, in its description, its thoughtfulness, and its spirit.

It is difficult to draw a hard and fast line between De Vere's religious and secular poetry where his sonnets are concerned. He wrote a great number of them, in the aggregate about 350. Several of these poems have, perhaps somewhat arbitrarily, been included in the former section on 'Religious Poetry', but with equal arbitrariness

many of the remaining sonnets might have been added. The majority of De Vere's sonnets are ethical in tendency and the religious element is never wholly absent in them. But in general we have classed under the head of 'Secular Poetry' all those sonnets which are the expression of De Vere's thoughts on human life, with its joys and sorrows, its transitoriness, its rights and its wrongs.

In these poems, too, the influence of De Vere's strong faith is discernible, because problems outside life, but closely connected with it, e.g. death, the hereafter, the origin of the soul, are not treated by him with that scepticism with which e.g. Tennyson examined them in his elegy *In Memoriam*. About the hereafter De Vere had the certainty of the true believer; nor did Death hold for him that terror which was constantly worrying Tennyson's mind. He shared Wordsworth's view of the pre-existence of the soul, as laid down in the ode *On Intimations of Immortality*, but none of his sonnets is entirely devoted to this subject, as was his father's poem, *Origin of the Soul*, in which the same view is entertained. The lines which reveal his attitude towards this problem are:

> Our vale of life at either end
> Is spanned by gates of gold; *(Consolations)*

and, addressing himself to degenerating man:

> Remember what thou wert and what thou art.

De Vere was not a metaphysician. His aim to impress upon man the thought of his higher mission on earth was not served by speculations in the realm of the abstract, but only by contemplation of what was real and recognised as real by every man, viz. the transitoriness of life and of all earthly things. On this recognition his whole view of life was based.

Already before his thirtieth year he had come to the conclusion that life is futile and that every attempt of man to build on its specious promises is rendered idle by the temporary character of his existence. He viewed life as an "exile" and each phase of it he regarded as disappointing. De Vere loved youth, the period of innocent, care-free life, the time of idealism and of longing for the great life that lies ahead and which youth likes to picture to itself in the most beautiful colours, because in it the dreams of childhood must come true. These are years of delight and joy, but, oh, they are so short and fugitive. They are soon gone by and the cares of life make themselves felt. This evanescence makes youth a period of "Sadness", and

so is the whole of life; it fleets past in rapid career. And what is the end of the ideals? They dwindle away to mere fancies that prove to be unattainable; but yet, it was delightful to conceive them ("they were sweet in sowing"). The joy was intense as long as it was there, but after this? The recollection of it is but a poor compensation. All these ideals make the years of adolescence joyous, but the years of childhood were even more so in their innocence and freedom from care. Life begins in glory, but fades more and more as man begins to apprehend his existence better. At the same time, however, his lost happiness is to some extent compensated for: his knowledge of God grows greater, he learns to see the purpose of his existence and is thus in a position to prepare himself better for the Hereafter. At middle age this knowledge becomes "a nearer good", and that is why everything in life should be valued, not as important for life itself, but as a gift from God, with a view to the life to come.

In one of those moments when a poet's constant reflections on his favourite subject will sometimes suddenly crystallize into singular beauty, and when inspiration for once unites all that is best in him, De Vere wrote down this meditation on life in the following sonnet, *Human Life:*

Sad is our youth, for it is ever going,
Crumbling away beneath our very feet:
Sad is our life, for ever is it flowing
In current unperceived, because so fleet:
Sad are our hopes, for they were sweet in sowing,
But tares, self-sown, have overtopped the wheat:
Sad are our joys, for they were sweet in blowing —
And still, O still, their dying breath is sweet.
And sweet is youth, although it has bereft us
Of that which made our childhood sweeter still:
And sweet is middle life, for it has left us
A nearer Good to cure an older Ill:
And sweet are all things, when we learn to prize them
Not for their sake, but His who grants them or denies them!

Despite its bad last line, this is a poem such as a sonnet-writer produces only once in his whole career, the best of what he can give, the pearl among all his sonnets. Shakespeare gave to English literature his sonnet *When to the Sessions of Sweet Silent Thought,* Milton *The Massacre in Piedmont,* Wordsworth *Earth has not anything to show more Fair,* Keats *On first looking into Chapman's Homer,* and De Vere's *Human Life* is worthy to be put in their company. In character these five sonnets show a great difference, but if *Human*

Life bears resemblance to any of them in depth of contemplation, sweetness of thought, wistful tenderness of tone, and richness of wisdom, it is to nothing less than Shakespeare's sonnet. It is the comprehension of all the thoughts which must inevitably rise, as they have always risen, to the mind of every Christian in moments of earnest self-contemplation, the poetic representation of the most important of human problems, the impression of life which comes, sooner or later, to every mortal. De Vere wrote several other poems of which the transitoriness of life forms the subject, e.g. *The flesh is weak; Why make ye thus your boast, O Mortal Nations; The light that played above thine infancy; Beatific vision of the Earth* (No. 1); and in nearly every poem of the second volume the thought of man's destiny is more or less clearly expressed, but none of them equals *Human Life* in beauty.

Human Life is more than a meditation on the brevity of life: it is at the same time the masterly expression of the paradoxical truth that every joy is a source of sorrow, every sorrow a source of joy. Through all centuries and among all races man has tried to fathom the depth of this paradox, and it has always attracted meditative poets in particular. In Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan* the antithesis occurs more than once, Goethe liked to dwell upon it in his poetical moods, and it is, partly at least, expressed in Alfred De Musset's *Une Soirée Perdue:*

> Cette mâle gaîté, si triste et si profonde,
> Que, lorsqu'on vient d'en rire, on devrait en pleurer.

Richard Crashaw formulated it in *The Weeper* as:

> Sweetness so sad, sadness so sweet,

which line obviously inspired De Vere to the writing of *Human Life,* and which was also present in Francis Thompson's mind when he wrote *The Daisy.* Among the Dutch poets the paradox is found already before Crashaw's time in the work of Jan van der Noot:

> O Vreugd van pynen vol, pyne vol vreugd gerezen!
> O Droefheid vol jolyts, O Blydschappe verfeld!

which was rendered, about three centuries later, by his countryman, Ten Kate, as:

> O Smart vol vreugde, o vreugde vol van smarte,
> Wat zyt gy toch, zoo gy geen liefde zyt?

None of these poets, however, shaped the paradox into that form which De Vere gave to it, nor did they apply it so distinctly to the several phases of human life.

De Vere's *Political Sonnets* are not less moral in their tendency than those relating to man in general. In them he did not advocate the views of any particular political party, but pointed out the duties which governments, monarchs, subjects, and nations had to perform on the principle of justice. As the perfect form of justice he stressed the inviolability of personal freedom, "the gift of all gifts"; it was not the liberty which degenerates into lawlessness, but the liberty which is "the necessary condition for the responsible discharge of ethical duties". He demanded that laws should be just and that they should be obeyed; but he strongly opposed every mode of wielding power which meant oppression and which was based on such a principle as "Might is Right". In these *Political Sonnets* De Vere turned against rulers who in his opinion were tyrants, such as Bonaparte *(The Napoleonic and the Democratic Despotism)*, William III *(On the Fall of a Usurper)* and Charles II, and he praised heroes and fighters for liberty, like Tell, Rienzi, Sarsfield, and Montrose. The 19th century was a period in which more than once attempts were made by nations to throw off the yoke of tyranny, e.g. the struggle between Ireland and England, of Poland against Russia, the Southern against the Northern States of America. De Vere followed these contests with great attention and invariably espoused the cause of the weakest party, the oppressed, even if he should thereby be forced to take sides against England. For this attitude some of his contemporaries reproached him with anti-English feelings, but his love for England was not less fervent than the patriotism of his accusers; only, the principle of justice had struck deeper root in his heart than in theirs. In the sonnet *On Reading an Untrue Charge* he strongly protested against this accusation. But even without this refutation De Vere's patriotic feelings towards England would have been beyond all doubt: the sonnets in which he honours England's greatness, e.g. in *Honour, to the Nobility of England,* and *To the Thames,* clearly show that in his heart he was more English than Irish. Only his patriotism did not express itself in blind chauvinism; both the imperialistic inclinations of Kipling and the violent passions of the Irish nationalists, were foreign to his nature. All these political sonnets are marked by dignity, earnestness, and sympathy for man.

The greater part of the *Descriptive Sonnets* consists of reminis-

cences of the journey which he made in 1839 and 1840 to Italy, Greece, Turkey, and Jerusalem. The old treasures of art which he visited in these countries were for him objects of study and he tried to put into his poetry the spirit of antiquity that they breathed. None of his sonnets convinces us, however, that he succeeded; whether we read *Constantinople, The Acropolis of Athens, The Theatre at Argos,* or *St. Peter's by Moonlight, The Arch of Titus, The Pillar of Trajan,* they all lack the atmosphere of antiquity. They testify to the extensive knowledge which the poet had acquired by studying history, art, and mythology, but the true poetic feeling is wanting in them. They are cold and were written without any colour or inspiration. The thought of freedom, of transitoriness, and of the Faith, constantly obtrudes itself upon the poet and the description of places or objects is often disturbed by accidental remarks. De Vere described too minutely and became therefore diffuse in most of these poems. His descriptions are more the judgments of a critic and a connoisseur of art than the impressions of a poet or an artist. Neither his admiration for the wisdom, the art, and the polity of the Greeks, nor his antipathy to Italy with its past of tyranny and rapacity, made much difference in these moralizing sonnets, and in general it may be said that his journey was described in a much more interesting and lively manner in his prose-work, *Picturesque Sketches of Greece and Turkey,* which was published in 1850.

De Vere is at his best in the nature-descriptions, in which, like his father, he displayed a great love for mountainous landscapes and the sea. These poems are not marred by unnecessary details and sometimes the mighty spectacle of the scene inspired him to grand thoughts of the created universe, as in *Sunrise, The Mountain Muse,* and in *For we the Mighty Mountain Plains have Trod.* The seventh line of the last-named poem is perhaps a little weak, but in the sestet we seem to hear Wordsworth himself, and Wordsworth at his best:

> For we the mighty mountain plains have trod
> Both in the glow of sunset and sunrise;
> And lighted by the moon of southern skies.
> The snow-white torrent of the thundering flood
> Have we not watched together? In the wood
> Have we not felt the warm tears dim our eyes
> While zephyrs softer than an infant's sighs
> Ruffled the light air of our solitude?
> O Earth, maternal Earth, and thou O Heaven-
> And Night first-born, who now, e'en now, dost waken

The host of stars, thy constellated train!
Tell me if those can ever be forgiven,
Those abject, who together have partaken
These sacraments of Nature — and in vain!

The remaining *Descriptive Sonnets* have the 'Human Affections' for their subject. Some of them are 'amatory' and were obviously written under the influence of the *Personal Sonnets* of his father and his mother. Wordsworth made it a principle to write no 'love-poetry'. "Had I been a writer of love-poetry", he declared to De Vere, "it would have been natural to me to write it with a degree of warmth which could hardly have been approved by my principles, and which might have been undesirable for the reader"[27]). De Vere's amatory sonnets do not mean, however, a return to the time of Queen Elizabeth, when the expression of sexual love was one of the most important characteristics of the sonnet. The love in De Vere's sonnets is but a Platonic love. It is true that poems like *Let me be near thee, Flowers I would bring, You say that you have given your love to me,* and *The spring of my sweet life thou madest thine,* suggest that "there had been some love-romance in his life", as his friend Sir William Rowan Hamilton supposed; but the latter received a negative answer to his question on this point. De Vere's amatory sonnets did not proceed from personal experience. He valued only the higher, spiritual love, the love that reaches beyond the grave, and which in his opinion was embodied in the bond between mother and child. Maternal love, filial love, and true friendship sometimes inspired him to sonnets full of tender feeling; but the 'Human Affections' too frequently turned him into the moralizing philosopher of the other series, so that most of these poems seem to be the products of a teacher rather than of a lyrical poet. On the whole his *Love Songs,* which do not show this tendency, are better than his *Love Sonnets.*

What has been said of De Vere's sonnets with respect to the difficulty of classing them either as religious or as secular poetry applies also to his narratives. If *The Infant Bridal,* one might ask, is treated as a religious story, why not *A Tale of the Modern Time,* which is the counterpart of the mediaeval tale? And why not *The Sybil, The Sisters, Psyche,* and *Antar and Zara?* These stories are as ethical in their tendency as the earlier ones. But they do not, like the others, relate particularly to the Middle Ages, and this period in history was in De Vere's mind inseparably bound up with religion and the Faith.

[27]) Aubrey de Vere, *Essays,* Chiefly on Poetry, vol. 1, p. 153.

The Sybil treats of the foundation of Rome, *The Sisters* is a pathetic tale about two Irish sisters at the time of the famine, *Psyche* is a love-story, and so is the Eastern romance, *Antar and Zara.* All these narratives are told with De Vere's characteristic dignity and seriousness, and especially in *The Sisters* he showed his talent as a story-teller; but in most cases they suffer from his usual fault — namely, prolixity.

The *Tale of the Modern Time* has an interest of its own. It is the story of a man who tries to find happiness in earthly pleasures, fame, and knowledge. God offers him His love as the only source of happiness, but the man scorns it and flies away before it. But he cannot escape God's love; wherever he goes, God pursues him with His love like a hunter. Whether he slackens or doubles his speed he hears the footfall of his pursuer; even on the battlefield, where in his despair he courts death, he is followed by the same tread. At last he hides himself in the solitudes of Nature and here the footstep leaves him. It is his time of penance. Memories of his childhood rise before him which soften his heart and then, in his sleep, he is forgiven. Suddenly a shadow comes to him and he expects to receive his deathblow. Instead he sees Jesus standing by his side, Who accepts him again as a friend. The man now realizes the uselessness of earthly fame and finds peace in the memories of his innocent childhood. He spends his life in solitude and whenever he hears the church-bells ringing for a bridal or a funeral he goes there, because they tell him of his own approaching bridal in death.

Every reader of Francis Thompson's work will be reminded by this tale of *The Hound of Heaven,* which is also the story of an unbeliever who flies from God's love and at last surrenders himself. The theme is an old one. Everard Meynell in his biography of Francis Thompson[28]) tells us that the idea of the soul's unavailing flight from God's love was already present in the writings of St. Augustine, and, in the Middle Ages, in Meister Eckhardt's. But he might as well have cast his net wider: the Psalmist made it his theme already in his song of praise (Psalm 139), Marlowe dramatized a similar tale in *The Tragical History of Dr. Faustus,* and in a modified form it was the subject of Tennyson's *Palace of Art* and Browning's *Easter Day.* Meynell thought that some analogy of subject might also be traced to De Quincey, but he admits that "to go to De Quincey's *Daughter of Lebanon* for the pedigree of *The Hound of Heaven* is like

[28]) *Francis Thompson,* by Everard Meynell, 1916.

going to the grocer's for the seeds, in coloured packets, of the passion-flower" (p. 164). The real "grocer" was De Vere with his *Tale of the Modern Time*. We must open this poem with the second half of part 2, where the divine tread begins to pursue the unbeliever, to make both poems start with the flight. In both it is a desperate one and the same idea of endlessness is expressed in De Vere's lines:

> I heard the sea, and rushed in panic thither;
> By ghostlike clouds, and woods my step made wither,
> And rock, and chasm that seemed to gape and sever,
> I rushed, and thought I rushed for ever and for ever.

The fugitive in *The Hound of Heaven* is pursued by "Those strong feet...."; in De Vere's poem the pursuit is less strenuous:

> For wheresoe'er I wandered by my side
> Another step appeared to tread and glide.

or it varies in strength:

> That footstep still I heard from all:
> Now harsh, now dull as moth fretting a coffin's pall.

There is another difference in the chase, for in De Vere's tale the footstep sometimes halted:

> I stopped, it stopped; I walked, it walked.

whereas in Thompson's poem the "unperturbed pace, deliberate speed, majestic instancy", never came to rest. In *A Tale of the Modern Time* the unbeliever flies away to solitude; this thought, "away from man", is also implied in Thompson's lines:

> I sought no more that after which I strayed
> In face of man or maid.

In both poems the unbeliever strives to know the secrets of Nature and Science, expressed by Thompson as:

> I drew the bolt of Nature's secrecies;

and by De Vere as:

> All Art and Science at the Gentile feast
> Of Western pride advanced, I knew right well.

Both poets have chosen sleep as the moment of forgiveness and in both cases the unbeliever regains his lost youth. The two poems differ

in the description of the fugitive's penance, but immediately after the likeness returns in Thompson's lines:

> Naked I wait Thy love's uplifted stroke!

although De Vere was thinking of a spear instead of a sword:

> No mocking fiend I saw, no lifted dart.

For both fugitives the moment of salvation has now come after their utter despair and Jesus extends His friendly hands to them:

> Rise, clasp my hand and come....

In De Vere's tale it runs:

> One hand in grief he pressed
> Upon the heaving shadow of a sorrowing breast.
> The other round my neck was thrown.

After the salvation Thompson says:

> Halts by me that footfall....

In De Vere's poem this had occurred already earlier, namely, at the moment when the unbeliever knew his soul: "Henceforth I walked alone"; but afterwards a shadow took its place. Both poets emphasize the persistent character of Jesus' pursuit; and, at the end, the meaning of the trumpet-sound in Thompson's poem, which reminds the unbeliever of God:

> Yet ever and anon a trumpet sounds
> .... His name I know.

corresponds with the meaning of the ringing church-bells in the other poem:

> Far off a bell is tolling....

With this parallel before us it is surely not too rash to say that Thompson, when writing *The Hound of Heaven,* had De Vere's *Tale of the Modern Time* in his mind. And, perhaps, he was indebted to De Vere for another thing, viz. the title of his poem. Originally it was called *The Heavenly Hunter.* Now it may be that Thompson, who knew De Vere's work well, had been struck by the expression, "The Winged Hound of Heaven", which occurs in De Vere's legend *Heida the Prophetess,* and that in this way the title was suggested to him, although he gave another meaning to it. But Thompson knew Shelley's work even better, and it is more likely that both he and De Vere took

their expression from *Prometheus Unbound*, where Shelley also speaks of "The Winged Hound of Heaven" in the beginning of the first act. De Vere certainly borrowed his from this lyrical drama, as his ode to Shelley (in *Irish Odes*) proves.

But let no hostile or unsympathetic critic of Thompson's poetry think that the literary value of *The Hound of Heaven* is in the least diminished by the fact that the poem had a skeleton ancestor in De Vere's tale. It is as original in conception as Shakespeare's "patched-up" dramas. Beyond the similarity of subject there is all the difference between the two poems of a philosophical treatise on the maxim of the Victorian Liberals and Scientists: "Be thou, O Man, the Lord of Earth", over against an entirely new creation of a great artist. Of course, Thompson could turn to account the errors made by De Vere. As a critic of poetry he was very sensitive; but he had also the power to correct them and to transform an indifferent story into a masterpiece of poetic imagination and melody. Under the working of his artistic sense and creative genius De Vere's *Tale* became a mighty product of poetic vision, a poem in which the most daring flights of a mystical mind alternate with the deepest searchings into the human heart, and in which the subtlest as well as the more violent emotions are called forth by a style as daring in its rhythm and word-formation as it is original. "In dit gedicht", says the Dutch critic H. Wismans, in his fine, scholarly discussion of Thompson's poetry[29]), "bespeelt de dichter alle toetsen en registers, waarover de taal beschikt"; and indeed, it is marvellous how pliant an instrument the English language became in Thompson's hands. De Vere was as much a master of the language as Thompson, but he lacked the latter's daring and boldness of imagination. Perhaps he also lacked that keen eye for proportions which made Thompson cut down the *Tale of the Modern Time* to half its length.

d. Dramatic Poetry

It is a proof of the versatility of De Vere's poetic nature that while in one part of his poetry, religious as well as secular, he successfully treated themes ranging from Antiquity and the Middle Ages to modern times in the lyrical and in the epic form, he used the dramatic in another part with equal distinction. Nearly all the great poets of the 19th century have essayed drama, but almost without exception

[29]) *De Katholiek*, 1908.

they have failed. Sir Walter Scott's genius for narrative fiction proved too discursive to make pieces like *The Doom of Devorgoil* and *Halidon Hill* real dramas. Wordsworth's tragedy *The Borderers,* "that most undramatic of dramas", as one of his critics has called it[30]), was bound to be a failure, produced as it was by a mind too much given to contemplation and wholly out of sympathy with action. Coleridge, though a metaphysician, possessed the gift of a dramatist; his play *Remorse* was performed on the stage, but the didactic element in it made its success only temporary. Landor's creations of men and women are all fine and noble, but they remained lifeless, Grecian statues rather than living beings. Keats's *Otho the Great* fell short in dramatic characterization: the young poet lacked the experience of life and the world necessary to make a good dramatist. Shelley and Byron were perhaps the most successful as writers of the poetic drama; but while in *The Cenci* the chief figures are largely conceived in the spirit of idealism, Byron stamped upon the heroes in his plays *Manfred, Marino Faliero,* and others, too much of his own self-centred character to give them sufficient variety. Tennyson imparted to his plays all the brilliancy of his diction, but this did not in the end save them as dramatic work. Browning and Sir Henry Taylor are the names most prominent in the history of 19th century drama, and it is with the greater of these two that De Vere's name as a dramatist ought to be linked.

From the beginning of his poetic career De Vere showed that he had a turn for the dramatic in verse. His first two publications were both enlivened by a dramatic piece, *The Waldenses* and *The Search after Proserpine,* which poems raised high expectations of his future attempts in this field. The second work, as we have seen, was greatly admired by Landor. De Vere may have been inspired to write this masque by Milton's *Comus,* with which it has in common that it possesses real dramatic qualities. In masques the dramatic element is subservient to the lyric; as a poetic form they are "in no wise connected with the popular stage, and in some ways distinctly undramatic", observes Allardyce Nicoll in his survey of the British Drama[31]). In some of the later types the dramatic element is entirely absent, as e.g. in Swinburne's *Masque of Queens,* which is a show of isolated

[30]) David Watson Rannie, *Wordsworth and his Circle;* London, Methuen & Co., 1907; p. 54.

[31]) Allardyce Nicoll, *British Drama, an Historical Survey from the Beginnings to the Present Time;* Harrap & Co. London, 1925; p. 210.

pictures, each representing a queen of olden times who describes her identity in lyrical verse. In Milton's *Comus,* on the other hand, the lyrical element is embodied mainly in the songs and dances near the close. In *The Search after Proserpine* dialogue and action are blended with song and dance, the lyrical element being perhaps a little stronger than the dramatic. In the four scenes of which the masque consists there are several choruses and semi-choruses, which describe, and sometimes announce, Ceres' experience on her wanderings from Sicily to Naxos and back. The style of the poem varies from vivacity of tone to ancient stateliness, but it nowhere approaches the majesty of Milton's verse. However, *The Search after Proserpine* shows a greater diversity of acting figures, and it contains fewer long speeches than *Comus*. The third scene does not advance the development of the action: it represents a discourse of the sea-nymphs in order to give such a view of earthly life as might present itself to beings dwelling not on the earth, but on a spot at one side of the earth. The author inserted this scene for the purpose of "preparing the mind for that higher estimate of earthly life as seen from above the earth, which is set forth in the conclusion of the poem". This 'higher estimate of earthly life' is necessary for the better understanding of the moral or truth which the masque contains with regard to the mystery of Joy and Grief in our Humanity, which truth is more definitely expressed in the last two lines of the poem:

> The sweetest joys that come to us
> Come sweeter for past sorrow!

The Waldenses, or *The Fall of Rora,* deals with the subject immortalized in Milton's sonnet, *The Massacre in Piedmont,* the wholesale slaughter of a religious sect, living in the Alps, by the Marquis of Pianessa, commander of the Duke of Savoy's forces, in 1655. At the request of the Abbot of Rora the Cardinal of Milan has come to Arnold, a Waldensian chieftain, to persuade him into submission to the Catholic Church. Arnold refuses, whereupon the troops of Pianessa burst into the valley of Rora. While the fight is going on the cruel abbot seizes a few hostages, among them Agnes, Arnold's daughter, whom he burns at the stake. For a considerable time the Waldenses, under their leader Gianavello, resist the attack successfully, but the odds are against them. Rora, the capital, is burnt down, and all the inhabitants are put to the sword with the exception of a few prisoners.

De Vere called his piece a 'Lyrical Sketch', and indeed, the lyrical

element is conspicuous in it. The sketch opens with a morning-hymn, there are several choruses and semi-choruses, and many songs of shepherds, children, etc. But, although some of these are very fine, — we may note the chorus "There was silence in the heavens" — the dramatic element is far more interesting. For in this poem we have the first indication of De Vere's power to picture the characters of men and women by their own acts and thoughts, and to call them into breathing life as acting persons. True, the picture of these men and women is but a 'sketch', that is to say, the part which each of them plays in the tragedy is only sufficiently outlined to give the reader, or the spectator, an idea of the sufferings undergone by the Waldenses, the illustration of which is the author's chief aim. But so admirably does De Vere with a few skilful touches draw each figure that it seems as if they had been portrayed in full detail. Take, for instance, the scene where the Cardinal, Attendants, and the Abbot of Rora, are ascending a glen:

Abbot

May it please your Grace to throw this mantle round you.
You are not wont, my Lord —

Cardinal

What am I better
Than any the poorest lackey in my train!
Give it, good friend, to him that needs it most.

Abbot (aside)

As if he wore no purple — Hypocrite!
(To his servant)
Good friend, have thou this cloak — (aside) And if he takes it
The worse for him the longest day he lives.

Cardinal

After long buffeting with this stormy night,
Methinks our hermitage is reached at last:
We lack but eagle-wings — Is that your convent?
High up, mile high, it hangs beneath that cloud.
Let us rest here — but no — On, on.

Abbot

My Lord,
These are the sorceries of the mountain air.
That convent, with its turrets and bright spires,
Is but a rock! Good speed for me in sooth
Were I but Lord of such a girth of towers!
Our shelter is hard by.

Cardinal

My eyes are dim.
No wonder — many vigils they have kept,
Seen many sorrows.

Abbot

Nay, my Lord, myself —

In this fragment from the beginning of the poem we are introduced to the hateful character of the scheming, ambitious, cruel abbot, who is the chief agent in the work of destroying the Waldenses, and to the more sympathetic character of the old, pacifying cardinal, who is deceived by the plotter. The passage reads as if a full five-act tragedy in the old Elizabethan style and spirit were to follow; and yet, *The Waldenses* is but a three-act drama, with very short scenes, and without a 'hero'. Equally skilful as the sketches of the Abbot and the Cardinal are those given of the honest, freedom-loving Arnold, of Gianavello's courageous sister, Marguerita, and of the shepherd-lass Hermia, who just before the fall of Rora tells the secret of her heart to her cousin Angela. But perhaps the most wonderful achievement of the author is that he contrives to create a deep sympathy with the martyr Agnes, who does not speak a single word in the play. It is not only by the horror of her fate that we are moved, but it is also by her very muteness and by the loving tenderness with which everybody, even the captain of the guard, speaks of her that she rises before the mind as a picture of angelic sweetness and mysticism. "The tragedy of the Waldenses", says De Vere in his short introduction to the play, "is lamented alike by Roman Catholic and Protestant historians"; but his dramatic representation of the persecution would have lost much of its force if he had not created such a pathetic figure as Agnes, in whose martyrdom he could make the tragedy culminate.

When after more than thirty years De Vere took up the historical drama his subjects were again chosen from the time of Antiquity and from the period which we are accustomed to call, somewhat vaguely, the Middle Ages. *Alexander the Great* deals with the meteoric career of the greatest general of Pagan times, — with the achievements and aspirations of a man whose conquests during ten years of war led him through Asia Minor, Syria, Egypt, Persia and India, and whose life, at the apex of glory, abruptly ended at Babylon. There is something tragic in this sudden death after so brilliant a career; but the real tragic note is supplied by the shock between Alexander's insa-

tiable pride, which made him feel almost like a god, and his passionate grief at the death of his only friend Hephestion, which rude reminder of his earthliness breaks his overmastering spirit.

It seems a somewhat hazardous enterprise for an author to use materials of so little dramatic interest as military exploits, political schemes, and religious ideas, for the composition of a drama; but so skilfully and naturally has De Vere interwoven these uncommon materials with the story of Alexander's one great vice and his intense love for Hephestion, that the play has become a real tragedy of heroic ambition, full of dramatic interest and beauty. From the very beginning the author contrives to bring us under the spell of that master mind whose genius and far-reaching successes revolutionized the history of the old world; we feel the character of the great conqueror grow upon us as in one scene after another its various elements are revealed to us, till we are fascinated by the imperiousness of his self-will, by the sweep of his mighty intellect, and by the force of that almost unerring instinct which is "like the craft of beasts remote from man". In the following passage the old general Parmenio, who had trained Alexander from his childhood, thus describes the young king's genius to his son Philotas:

> But half you know him.
> There is a zigzag lightning in his brain
> That flies in random flashes, yet not errs:
> Chances his victories seem: but link those chances,
> And under them a science you shall find,
> Though unauthentic, contraband, illicit,
> Yea, contumelious oft to laws of war.
> Fortune, that as a mistress smiles on others,
> Serves him as duty-bound: her blood is he,
> Born in the purple of her royalties.
> On me long time she frowned: these mailéd fists
> Smote her on breast and brow for thirty years,
> From Athos westward to the Illyrian coasts,
> Ere yet she learn'd to love me. He too loves me!
> Though jealous of my fame.

The clearness with which we are made to see how this "zigzag lightning in his brain" reflects itself in every act of Alexander, in his strategy, and in his policy towards the vanquished peoples, is a proof of the author's fine workmanship. But not less admirable is the picture which he gives of the growth of the hero's overbearing pride. In order to bring out "this all-pervading vice in Alexander's character" De Vere

has made use of a legend, recorded in Josephus' *Antiquities* [32]), that at the beginning of his career Alexander visited the Temple of Jerusalem, where he was told by the high priest about his divine task. From that moment Alexander cherishes the thought that he is heaven sent. At first he still believes that there is a deity above him and he is inclined to recognize the sublimity of the Persian creed, but gradually all evidence of a higher life in him dies out and, blinded by his dazzling military successes, he becomes more and more ambitious. In his overweening pride he looks with scorn upon all the religions which he encounters in his campaigns, and at last he begins to think that he is

> less a person than a power,
> Some engine in the right hand of the gods,
> Some fateful wheel that, round in darkness rolling,
> Knows this — its work; but not that work's far scope.

With this vice of self-idolatry and moral recklessness in Alexander's character the author has finely contrasted the virtuous and noble nature of the conqueror's friend. Hephestion is a type of unselfishness, of humility and fidelity, one of those figures in Ancient History who, though pagan in mind, anticipated Christian ideals by the moral grandeur of their souls. His only ambition is to serve his master dutifully and to minister to the king's greatness. In his attachment to Alexander he accepts the conqueror's decisions without criticism, and he even conceals his own love for the Persian princess, Arsinoe, when the king announces that his marriage with her is necessary for the execution of his political scheme to establish a fusion between Greece and Persia. Alexander is not aware of Hephestion's love for Arsinoe; he is too much engrossed in his own exalted personality, in his conquests, and in his dreams of founding a large empire, to understand the human feelings of his friend. He loves Hephestion passionately, but, as the latter complains after Arsinoe has been lost to him, the King truly "knew him never". By picturing the self-abandonment and the unswerving fidelity of Hephestion De Vere has contrived to provide us a fine standard with which to compare the dwindling awe of Alexander's mind and the growing moral recklessness of his keen and political sagacity.

On one point, however, we think that the play is not quite satisfactory : De Vere hardly delineates Alexander's attachment to his friend. In his conversations with Hephestion the King is made often enough

[32]) See De Vere's Preface to *Alexander the Great.*

to protest his love for his friend; but we are not shown the affection itself. This defect is particularly felt in the scene describing the visit of the two friends to the tombs of Achilles and Patroclus at Troy, in which description the author might have seen his way to depict Alexander's true tenderness for Hephestion more fully. As it is, we are informed of the King's affection rather than that it is painted to us.

But this shortcoming detracts only little from the play, the construction of which is for the rest irreproachable. The tragedy is marked by many passages of fine poetic diction, imaginative insight, and deep, philosophic thought, as for instance Alexander's passionate address to his mutineering soldiers, or the description of his delirious fever; and there is at least one beautiful lyric in the play: the fine paraphrase of the Psalm *Super Flumina Babylonis*. But let us illustrate some of its high dramatic qualities by quoting that passage in which Alexander describes to Ptolemy, the chronicler of his deeds, the fierce dream of his failure: —

Ptolemy.

Immortal gods!
To this high sufferer grant the balm of sleep!

Alexander

Sleep! Can you guard me 'gainst ill dreams in slumber?
I'll tell you one. I died; and lay in death
A century 'mid those dead Assyrian kings
In their old tomb by yonder stagnant lake.
Then came a trumpet-blast that might have waked
Methought a sleeping world. It woke not them.
I could not rise: I could not join the battle:
Yet I saw all.

Ptolemy.

What saw you, sire?

Alexander

Twelve tents,
Each with my standard. On twelve hills they stood
Which either on their foreheads blazon'd wore,
Or from my fancy's instinct took, great names,
Cithaeron, Haemus, Taurus, Libanus,
Parapomisus, and huge Caucasus,
With other five, and Athos in the midst.
Then from my royal tents on those twelve hills,
Mail'd in mine arms, twelve Alexanders crown'd
With all their armies, rush'd into a plain,

Which quaked for fear, and dash'd across twelve floods,
Euphrates, Issus, Tigris, Indus, Oxus,
And others with great names. They met — those Twelve —
And, meeting, swelled in stature to the skies,
And grappled, breast to breast, and fought, and died,
Save four that, bleeding, each on other stared,
And lean'd upon their swords. As thus they stood,
Slow from that western heaven which domes the accursed —
Rome's bandit brood — there moved a cloud night-black,
Which, onward-gathering, master'd all the East,
And o'er it rain'd a rain of fire. The earth
Split, and the rivers twelve in darkness sank;
The twelve great mountains crumbled to the plain;
The bones of those twelve armies ceased from sight.
Then from the sun that died, and dying moon,
And stars subverted, fell great drops of blood,
Large as their spheres, till all the earth was blood;
And o'er that blood-sea rang a female cry,
"The Royal House is dead".

De Vere's second drama, *St. Thomas of Canterbury*, is a work in some respects analogous to *Alexander the Great*, and in others a contrast to it. The character of Archbishop Thomas à Becket is very much like Hephestion's, while King Henry II has a great deal in common with Alexander; and the parts which Becket and his Royal master play in the drama resemble those of Hephestion and Alexander, but reversed of course. By making Becket the leading figure in his second poem De Vere wanted to illustrate in *St. Thomas of Canterbury* the ultimate victory of humility as contrasted to the downfall of pride in *Alexander the Great*.

Of course, the interests represented in the person of Becket are very different from those embodied in Hephestion. In the history of his epoch St. Thomas stands as a champion of the lawful rights and traditional liberties of the Church, a true patriarch, who, like his predecessor Anselm, upheld the cause of the Church, and with it the higher national interests of the people, against a despotic king and usurping barons. During the period of his chancellorship he had been on friendly terms with King Henry, but after his election to the See of Canterbury and his resignation as Chancellor the relations between him and the King grew tenser, although Becket on his part never ceased to love Henry. His sublime failure in the attempt at reconciling his duty to the Crown with his duty to the Church is the tragic note which runs through De Vere's drama from beginning to end.

As a dramatic play *St. Thomas of Canterbury* is far more attractive than *Alexander the Great*. This, no doubt, is partly due to the subject itself: St. Thomas's life, especially the latter part of it, lends itself better for dramatic representation than Alexander's life of military and political conquests; but the greater attractiveness of De Vere's second poem is attributable no less to the author's noble conception of the two leading figures, and in general to the ability with which he has executed his work. He has conceived Becket not merely as an English Prelate whose principles in upholding sacerdotal authority came into conflict with the aspirations of the King, but he has also conceived him as an instrument and a victim of that flexible policy of the Church in the Middle Ages which was broad or narrow as occasion demanded. This second aspect of Becket as a dramatic figure adds a wider interest to the play: by the side of the struggle between an English subject and his Royal master we are shown the slowly-revolving, but securely-working machinery of the Church coming into collision with the smooth-running, but fragile machinery of the State. Various Church dignitaries have been introduced into the drama for the purpose of illustrating, each by his own character, some peculiarity of the complex ecclesiastical system, finest among them being the pictures of John of Salisbury, the devout and accomplished diplomatist Churchman, and Herbert of Bosham, a saint and a mystic visionary, simple as a child, pure, and benign, whose profound faith gave him the power to see in all things the symbols of the things invisible. These two men are the mainstay of Becket in the hour when he needed friendship most. To their serene characters are very ably contrasted the figures of such degraded ecclesiastics as Gilbert Foliot and John of Oxford, two types of hypocrisy and unscrupulousness at a time when the service of the State seemed to them more profitable than the service of God. They are to be ranged on the side of the Court party, with those nobles and officials who were willing instruments in the hands of their mighty sovereign. The picture of King Henry is unique. With the hero of the play he is the most luminous personality in the drama. He is depicted as another Alexander, not indeed endowed with the superhuman genius of the latter, but still as selfish, sudden, and daring in his enterprises, and showing himself an even more dangerous enemy by his greater subtlety of state-craft and fierceness of passion. The following graphic sketch is given of his animal-like cunning by the French Archbishop of Sens, who knows him well: —

Your King is sudden:
The tidings of his march and victory reach us
Like runners matched. That slender, sinewy frame,
That ardent eye, that swift on-striding step,
Yet graceful as a tiger's, foot descending
Silent but sure on the predestinate spot —
From signs like these looks forth the inward man.

Fine, too, are the glimpses given us of Henry in his outbursts of uncontrollable fury, for instance when he crushes under foot the Great Seal on receiving it back from Becket, and of the pernicious influence exerted over him by his malignant wife, Queen Eleanor, of whom an English noble says with some grandiloquence: —

That smile is baleful as a winter beam
Streaking some cliff wreck-gorged; her hair and eyes
Send forth a glare half sunshine and half lightning.

Against such a combination of royal aggression and desertion by some of the higher clergymen Becket has to wage his war of ecclesiastical freedom. Amid perfidy and clamorous demands he stands a veritable hero, undaunted by the pressure put upon him and undismayed when even the good French King and the papal legates themselves forsake him. With the tenacity of a mastiff he defends what he knows to be right and just. But the greatness of his heroism does not lie in any form of outward bravery; his courage is of the spiritual kind, the courage of a man whose moral strength increases in the hour of trial, and in whom the virtues of fidelity, humility, and self-renunciation are deepened through suffering. This picture of St. Thomas's heroism, and of his steady progress in sanctity, is revealed to us with great delicacy as the author makes his hero pass from humiliation to humiliation. With admirable skill De Vere illustrates the purifying effect produced on Becket's soul by each of the trials which he has to sustain, until at last the poet carries the delineation of his hero's saintly character to a height in that beautiful scene which represents Becket defending his principles and pleading with King Henry to subdue his lower ambition. The following passage is part of this interview in "The Traitor's Meadow, near Freitval": —

Becket

Then judge me justly, O my King, my friend,
Casting far from you, like a sundered chain,
A thought abhorred, an ignominy down-trodden,
The oppression of dead error. Say, shall I,

A Christian bishop, and a subject sworn,
Be pagan more than pagan, doubly false —
False to a heavenly kingdom throned o'er earth,
False to an earthly kingdom raised to heaven,
And ministering there, high on the mount of God,
'Mid those handmaiden daughters of a King
Who gird the Queen gold-vested? Pagans, sire,
Lived not, though dark, in Babylonian blindness:
The laws of that fair city which they loved
Subjecting each man, raised him and illumined.
We, too, are citizens of no mean City:
Her laws look forth on us from rite and creed:
In her the race of Man Redeemed we honour,
Which — cleansed from bestial, and ill spirits expelled —
In unity looks down on us, God's Church,
The Bride of Christ, beside the great King throned,
Who on his sceptre leans. My King, my friend!
I have done to you no wrong! My many sins
Lay other where. Tenfold their compt would rise,
If, sane myself, I pandered to your madness.

King Henry

Thomas, you lack what only might convert me: —
Could you be England's King, her primate I,
Your part I too would play!

Becket

And O how nobly
And unlike me in fashion you would play it!
How petty my discourse hath been till now: —
Sir, see these things as you will one day see them!
Two lots God places in the hand of each:
We choose, and oft we choose the lot least loved.
The youth who slays life's hope in blind excess
Knows not that deep within his heart — far deeper
Than all base cravings — those affections live
Which sanctified his father's home. Years pass:
Sad memories haunt the old man in his house,
Sad shadows strike the never-lighted hearth,
Sad echoes shake the child-untrodden floors:
A great cry issues from his famished heart —
"I spurned the lot I loved".

King Henry

My youth is past:
It had its errors; yet within my house
Are voices young and sweet.

Becket

God keep them such!
Far better silence, and the lonely hall,
Than war-cries round the hearth. God guard your children!
If you have risen against the Church, your mother,
God guard them from revolt against their sire!

Poetry such as this goes far to justify the admiration and praise with which the two dramas on their appearance were received by some critics. The *Pall Mall Gazette* recognised in De Vere a poet who "is master of his instrument, and rarely offends the ear with false notes"; the *Standard,* in speaking of De Vere's dignified diction in *Alexander the Great,* declared that "it often rises to sublime pitch, leaving all his contemporaries far behind"; while Richard Holt Hutton, who reviewed the two plays at some length in the *Spectator*[33]), gave it as his opinion that both poems "ought to make a reputation". This critic, one of the best of his time as regards discernment and insight into dramatic work, wrote of *Alexander the Great* in particular that "De Vere has produced a play which ought to ensure for his name a permanent place among the more refined and intellectual of our dramatists". In all these reviews there is a tendency to rank *Alexander the Great* higher than *St. Thomas of Canterbury.* But we think that it was the subject of the latter play which to some extent prejudiced De Vere's Anglican reviewers against it. In our opinion *St. Thomas of Canterbury* is superior to *Alexander the Great.* It is not only that Becket as a dramatic figure is infinitely more real than the somewhat misty figure of the pendant to Alexander, but the dialogues are more varied and the action is livelier in De Vere's second drama, owing to the fact that in it there is a greater variety and clearer delineation of acting persons than in *Alexander the Great.* Practically the conqueror and his friend are the only persons in the latter play whose characters are depicted at all. Matthew Arnold, too, thought *St. Thomas of Canterbury* De Vere's best performance, and in comparing it with Tennyson's drama on the same subject, *Becket,* he did not hesitate to rank De Vere's play above it. Arnold was right: Tennyson's *Becket* is far too long, and there are some serious structural faults in it. De Vere would not have been betrayed into such an error as Tennyson committed by introducing grotesque scenes, like that of Rosamund's unexpected interruption at the moment when Eleanor wants to stab Rosamund.

[33]) *The Spectator,* June 20, 1874; and July 1, 1876.

Inordinate length is the defect usually pointed out by critics of the Victorian drama as the reason why it failed to be as popular as the Elizabethan play. We do not accept this as the main reason of its failure. Sir Henry Irving actually put Tennyson's *Becket* on the stage in 1891, in a severely abridged form, it is true, but with some success, as Andrew Lang tells us [34]; and this method might have been applied to many other Victorian dramas. But, even when shortened, they would hardly be fit for the stage, certainly less fit than the average Elizabethan play. The point is that most of them are biographical, whereas the Elizabethan drama is mainly episodical. We are not so much interested in the *life* of a man, with its difficulties, its successes, and its failures, as in his *conduct* at particular moments and under particular circumstances. The first we may learn from any book of history, but the second teaches us a lesson of human wisdom and opens our eyes to other possibilities than those conceived in our own minds. Roughly, there were two kinds of 19th century drama: the intellectual drama, and what has been called the chronicle play. The first contained little action and occupied itself chiefly with the advocacy of some idea, or the analysis of some mental problem. Shelley, Coleridge, and especially Browning, were its principal creators. The second did contain action and thought, but it usually reviewed the whole life of some historical person. That is what made these chronicle plays so long. Henry Taylor wrote his *Philip van Artevelde* in two parts, and Sir Aubrey de Vere, too, produced such a twin drama in *Mary Tudor.*

As regards their literary character Aubrey de Vere's dramas *Alexander the Great* and *St. Thomas of Canterbury* hold a position between the intellectual drama and the chronicle play. Both dramas are philosophical studies, inasmuch as they were designed to illustrate two important ideas [35] — namely, the idea of pagan greatness, represented in Alexander, and the idea of Christian greatness, represented in Becket; but they are at the same time biographical. In their first character — and this, we think, is the stronger of the two — they show a striking resemblance to Browning's intellectual dramas, such as *Sordello* and *Strafford;* in their second they remind us of his father's *Mary Tudor* and Henry Taylor's *Philip van Artevelde.* Sir Aubrey is greater in the old tradition of the drama, in the represen-

[34]) Andrew Lang, *Alfred Tennyson;* Blackwood & Sons, Edinburgh, 1901 p. 190.

[35]) See *Recollections,* p. 363.

tation of action, and of character displayed in action; Aubrey excels, like Browning, in the internal development of character *amid* circumstances rather than in its delineation *by* action. In this art Browning, again, was the more skilful. But, although surpassed by perhaps the two greatest dramatists of his day on two separate points, Aubrey surpassed both his father and Browning in another respect: he showed at any rate a greater versatility by combining in his nature the two faculties.

e. Disciple of Wordsworth

Aubrey de Vere, as all his poetical work shows, chiefly lived by admiration. There is nothing uncommon in his poetry, nothing of the experimentalist; he generally followed the paths which had been trodden before him by those poets who in his youth had given him delight: Crashaw, Milton, Landor, Sir Walter Scott, Tennyson, Browning, — the influence of all of them is more or less distinctly visible in his work. Sir Aubrey's solemn tones are plainly heard in his son's religious and dramatic verse, while Shelley's lyrical note is at times clearly audible in De Vere's songs. But the loudest and most persistent voice that speaks in De Vere's work is Wordsworth's. Aubrey admired this poet as no other. His admiration of the Rydal Singer took indeed a form that approached to devotion. He remained true to him through his long life and all changes of poetic fashion: when other gods were enthroned in the market-place his worship was unchanged.

That De Vere never withdrew his homage from Wordsworth is best seen in his numerous sonnets. If we except his master, whose number of sonnets exceeds De Vere's by another hundred, it will be difficult to find a poet whose sonnet-production equals that of the disciple. Aubrey's sonnets stretch over the whole of his career. After the fairly unbroken line of sonnet-writers, such as Wordsworth, Keats, S. T. Coleridge, Hartley Coleridge, Sir Aubrey de Vere, and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, a period followed in which the sonnet seems to lose much of its popularity. In comparison with these poets the form was rarely used by Patmore, Thompson, Swinburne, Morris, and Matthew Arnold: the fifteen sonnets of Tennyson, too, were all of them written before 1850. But De Vere continued the tradition which he had followed from his twentieth year up to 1893, when he published *Mediaeval Records and Sonnets.* Especially the more than 130 sonnets he wrote after 1850 are a testimony of his loyalty to Wordsworth, a

childlike and almost pathetic loyalty in the grey-haired poet. In the *Academy* number for January 25, 1902, Francis Thompson declared that "at the close of his career De Vere had become 'vieux jeu' to the modern critic", and really, De Vere as a writer of sonnets in the Wordsworthian vein belonged to the past already long before 1880. It is true that in his later years he endeavoured to enter into the ideas of the younger generation by reading the poems of the most celebrated among them, e.g. Rudyard Kipling, but the new spirit no longer appealed to him.

Wordsworth is the poet whose name is intimately connected with the revival of the sonnet about 1800. For a long time since Milton the sonnet had almost entirely disappeared from English literature — Dryden and Pope did not write a single one —, and not before the second half of the 18th century did it show any sign of resuscitation in the work of poets like William Cowper, Thomas Warton, William Lisle Bowles, William Roscoe, and Charlotte Smith. Wordsworth reawakened the interest in the poetic form among the 'Romanticists' as well as the Early Victorians, an interest which is comparable to the enthusiasm with which the sonnet was practised among the Elizabethans from 1590 to 1600. Wordsworth stands at once for the beginning and the end of the revival: he opened the long line of sonnet-writers in 1800 and closed it in 1850. Nobody ever showed such a predilection for the sonnet as he, no poet defended it in word and deed with so much warmth, and his 450 sonnets, the fruit of 50 years' labour in "the sonnet's scanty plot of ground", will perhaps for ever defy the most persistent efforts of any rival to surpass him. He was the soul of the revival and the new stage which the sonnet reached after 1800 was defined by the character which he gave to it.

The theory of the function of poetry which Wordsworth developed and defined in his Preface to the second edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* (1800) underlies the composition of his sonnets as well as of all his other poems. His conviction was that all poetry ought to be directed to the spiritual elevation of man by stimulating him to thoughts of his higher mission on earth. The whole earth, all the material world, bore witness to this mission and reflected "the primary laws of our nature". Especially in Nature, and in common, everyday things, these laws were embodied. But only the poet, with his gift of accurate observation and his sensitiveness, possessed the power to apprehend them and it was his task to guide the reader in the contemplation of them. The poet is a teacher of man, in whom the latent faculty to imbibe

the wisdom of Nature must be cultivated. "To endeavour to produce or enlarge this capability is one of the best services in which, at any period, a Writer can be engaged". In order to attain this end a poet, speaking as he does to all mankind, should not use a special language. Wordsworth set his face against what he called *Poetic Diction*, the use of an ornate style, which in the hands of thoughtless poets often caused inaccuracies and obscurity of meaning through the wrong use of metaphors. He avoided the conventional style of the poets of the 18th century and endeavoured to use in his poems, in accordance with their subjects, a selection of the ordinary spoken language.

Wordsworth's endeavours to make poetry serviceable to the moral elevation of man and his striving after simplicity of style caused a great change in the character of the sonnet. He widened the function of the sonnet by using the form for the interpretation of thoughts and ideas, impressions of the moment being only of secondary importance with him. Instruction was his chief aim: he wished to be considered "as a teacher or as nothing". Profound and constant reflection in the solitude of the Lake District, and a special gift which enabled him to understand the teachings of Nature, had produced in him a 'habit of mind' to associate his observation of the commonest objects and occurrences with thoughts of human life; and thoughtfulness, the philosophical contemplation of man's fate and destiny, this was what he deemed the most important element in a sonnet, or in any other poem. Philosophical contemplation, called forth by any inspiring object, was the principal characteristic of the Wordsworthian sonnet.

Until the publication of his series *Ecclesiastical Sonnets* (1821), the *Itinerary Sonnets* (1833), and the *Memorials of a Tour in Italy* (1837), Wordsworth had used the sonnet form with considerable success. With Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, and Keats he is generally considered one of the great masters in the art of sonnet-writing. From the appearance of his first sonnet-series (1802) he had his detractors, who contemptuously ridiculed his work; but his influence on the poets of his time was immediate and, in a sense, general, although there were several who disliked his didacticism and soon followed their own bent, as e.g. John Keats. Wordsworth had most imitators among religious poets, such as Sir Aubrey de Vere, Aubrey de Vere, Frederick William Faber, John Henry Newman, Charles Tennyson Turner, and Richard Chenevix Trench. Not that his sonnets testified to a deep faith: his esteem for the Church of England proceeded from patriotism

rather than from real religious feeling, as his *Ecclesiastical Sonnets* abundantly prove. And yet, there is no denying that in his aspirations he was led by moral principles of universal acceptance and that his work sounded a new note in Christian poetry; for in Wordsworth's poems man was for the first time viewed in the one position in which he ought to be viewed, namely, as a being with a higher destination. Already Spenser had made the relation between God and man the subject of his poetical speculations, but with him man had always remained a being of 'Fairy-Land', ideal and unreal. Shakespeare in his musings was rarely carried farther than the human, earthly part in man, while Milton, who did penetrate more deeply, often lost sight of man altogether. With Wordsworth man was real, a creature whose existence had a purpose; and it was the teaching of this truth which made Wordsworth in the eyes of the religious poets an apostle of the Christian idea.

Aubrey de Vere's discipleship shows itself in the external as well as in the internal qualities of his sonnets. If Wordsworth had paid little attention to form, as compared with Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton, De Vere bestowed even less care on it and treated construction, rhyme, and such factors, as if they were of secondary importance. In many of his sonnets there is no trace of a division into Octave and Sestet, nor did he always follow the custom that personal reflection ought to be preceded by general description. In many cases he allowed his thoughts or his description to run on to the last line without any perceptible break, and frequently the number of 14 lines appeared to be inadequate for his purpose. Then a second, or even a third sonnet was necessary to complete the first, as for instance in *The Tomb of Agamemnon, The Poetic Function, Marcella, Milton Visiting Galileo, A Church Yard, To a Mountain in Switzerland,* and *Beatific Vision of the Earth.* This form of 'enjambement', which is also found in Wordsworth's work, e.g. *Those Words were uttered as in pensive mood,* or *As Indignation Mastered Grief,* caused the sonnet to lose one of its chief characteristics, "its oneness", as Edmund Gosse called it [36]). Rhyme and rhythm, too, are frequently inaccurate in De Vere's sonnets, and sometimes he only succeeded in surmounting these difficulties of rhyme and rhythm by sacrificing the natural word-order to them. We then come across constructions like:

The sinner to his mask who clings

[36]) *Chambers' Cyclopaedia:* The Elizabethan Sonnet; vol. 1.

or,

> One hour for holy mourning who may win
> Amid the clamour of the world's loud mart?

lines, which impede the flow of the poem. The frequent application of 'enjambement', the inaccuracy of rhyme, and the unnatural word-order show that De Vere was not a poet with a fine ear for harmony and melody, and that, like his father, he looked upon the sonnet as a traditional mode of expressing thought rather than as a congenial artistic form. Wordsworth never neglected the outward form to such an extent, not even in his period of decay. He always treated rhyme and natural order with care, and if there is any similarity between the two poets as regards their attitude towards form, it is only in so far that both ranked the contents higher.

Like Wordsworth De Vere was a philosophic poet. He, too, started from the principle that poetry had to perform a function and that, first of all, it ought to serve the higher interests of man. In several of his poems we find this conviction theoretically expressed, e.g. in *To a Young Poetess, The Poetic Function,* and *To King Louis of Bavaria*; but in the introduction to the third volume he defined his views with respect to the poetic function precisely: "In illustrating that divine beauty which still hangs in broken gleams around a fallen world; — in tracing a love more than human which lives within the human affections; — in cherishing justice and truth as the foundations unremoved amid the fleeting pageantry of outward things; — and in thus inculcating fidelity to the righteous cause, especially when obscured or trampled on; — in doing these things, Poetry discharges a moral function, auxiliary to a higher teaching than her own". This is not a theory in which new ideas are put forward, such as Wordsworth advanced in his Preface; already long before De Vere's time many religious poets had sung of 'divine beauty', of 'human affections', and of 'justice and truth'. But De Vere's standpoint in dealing with these subjects differed from theirs in that he laid stress on the instructive value of poetry. A comparison with the Preface shows that his conception of the poetic function was based on the same fundamental idea as Wordsworth's, viz. that a poet should be a teacher of man. This conformity accounts for the strong resemblance between their works as regards thoughtfulness, description, mood, and subject.

In one respect, however, there remained a difference between the two poets: Nature had not the same value in the teaching of the disciple as in that of the master. To Wordsworth Nature was his

Church, through which he was in direct communion with his God. In his moments of inspiration he felt, nay, he seemed to see the same great moral truths which to others came through belief or Biblical revelation only; in such moments he had visionary gleams of that supernatural world to which man's thought is ever aspiring in his search for happiness, gleams somewhat similar in character to the raptures experienced by some of the saints on earth when they were privileged to have a momentary glimpse of Heaven's glories[37]). And what Wordsworth felt and saw he had the power to express in poetry when the mood of inspiration was on him. To interpret Nature as a supernatural world in itself, to explain to his fellow-men her revealing power, and to represent her as a mistress who teaches truths not preconceived, this is the essence of Wordsworth's art. For De Vere, too, Nature was a strengthening and educative power. He loved Nature very much and he often drew lessons of high moral wisdom from her; but her teachings were far less illuminative to him than to Wordsworth. Nor did he share his master's view that the joys which Nature affords are the exclusive source of man's happiness. De Vere's philosophy was chiefly based upon religious faith, and he insisted that nothing upon earth can make life really joyous or happy, unless happiness be found in the Faith. His acceptance of Revelation as the highest authority and as the surest guide to truth gave to his teaching a greater definiteness, but from the standpoint of poetry his method of instruction was less original than Wordsworth's.

De Vere is by no means a pessimist. He judged life objectively and, although the thought of transitoriness pervades a large part of his poetry, the dark side is never without its brighter. His poems have not the despondency of e.g. Tennyson's *Confessions of a Sensitive Mind, The Two Voices, In Memoriam,* or *The Lotos Eaters,* and it characterizes him as a teacher of fortitude and perseverance that he always ends with holding out Hope, as the best antidote against despair. *Human Life,* in which the Octave deals with the "Sadness", and the Sestet with the "Sweetness", is an example of it. De Vere is an optimist, a poet who by his firm belief, his deep knowledge of human nature, his sweetness of character, and his sympathy with his fellow-beings, possessed to an extraordinary degree the power to inspire Hope and Consolation, as a charm

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[37]) Cp. F. W. H. Myers, *Wordsworth,* p. 128; (English Men of Letters) Macmillan, London; 1906.

"against that ice-idol, blank Reality".
(from *Beatific Vision of the Earth*)

It is one of the principal qualities of his *Moral Sonnets* that a strong consoling influence emanates from them. To give his fellowmen hope, to strengthen them and to encourage them, this was the task which he had set himself as a man and as a poet. This also explains why he wrote by preference about the 'Sorrows' of life and why he always took the side of those who had been driven to despair by deaths, unanswered love, or oppression.

There is no use in debating the question which poet among Wordsworth's followers is the best: opinions about the significance of a poet are very personal and depend for a large part on the question what qualities in his work are considered the most valuable. One critic claims the first place for William Watson, a poet who wrote at the close of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century; another raises Charles Tennyson Turner above him, while a third, again, holds that F. W. Faber's superiority is beyond dispute. If, however, 'the best' is taken in the sense of 'the most Wordsworthian', there is little doubt but that De Vere must be named first. Neither in Watson's poetry, nor in the sonnets of Turner, Faber, or any other poet, is the 'Wordsworthian spirit' so strong as in De Vere's. They may equal him, perhaps even surpass him in some respect or other, e.g. in subtlety or accuracy of nature description, — certainly an important element in the Wordsworthian art —, but none of them followed the Rydal Singer so consciously and steadfastly in the application of the chief principle, in the eyes of Wordsworth himself the chief principle: the teaching of humanity. All De Vere's contemplative sonnets serve this purpose and in most of the descriptive ones the method and tendency are the same as in Wordsworth's. Only once did he swerve from this path, viz. in the amatory sonnets. But these poems constitute only a small group. To some extent he was even more tenacious in the pursuit of his aim to instruct than Wordsworth. In all his poetry he wrote nothing that could stand comparison with the open-hearted autobiography in the *Prelude*, and none of his poems can be called really personal in the sense of his father's. De Vere was far less communicative about himself than the two other poets, both as regards his outward and his inward life. His desire to teach gave a strong didactic character especially to his *Moral Sonnets*.

As didactic poetry Aubrey de Vere's sonnets are on a higher level than his father's. Sir Aubrey's teachings are merely disconnected

units of a philosophy which remains within the sphere of thought of every contemplative Christian. Aubrey's philosophy, on the other hand, soars much higher and is in its entirety a system, in which the aim is pursued with special means. The range of his speculations stretches even farther than Wordsworth's. However, he is not such a deep thinker as the latter. He is broad in his contemplation of the Faith, of morality, of the past, of transitoriness, and of human nature; but he remains superficial. Like Wordsworth he points out especially the significance of the material world for man, and striking images or comparisons sometimes lend a truly poetic character to his method of representation, but he does not penetrate into the deeper essence of things. That is why he seldom surprises the reader with those brilliant flashes which repeatedly blaze out from Wordsworth's sonnets, magical intimacies "that suddenly pierce the soul or thrill us with a sense of things divinely remote", as Francis Thompson put it[38]). This difference in depth of contemplation chiefly makes the difference in greatness between the two poets.

Of the several criticisms which appeared of Aubrey de Vere's poetry during his life, or shortly after his death, Henry Taylor's is the first, and in the way of criticism the worst. He incorporated his two earlier reviews in a third, which was published in 1878 (it is in the 5th volume of his *Works*), and contrived to produce in it perhaps the most abominable species of criticism in the language. The larger part of it is about any subject save De Vere's poetry and several of the remaining pages are occupied by quotations from the poems. This review is an instance of the truth in Rogers's saying: "If you wish to have your works coldly reviewed, get your intimate friend to write an article upon them"[39]). There is not one note of enthusiasm, not any mark of sympathy in the whole essay of this dear friend of De Vere's, and if in his patronizing manner he could bring himself to extend an epithet of appreciation to one or two poems, he detracted in the next sentence more from his praise than he had conceded. The *Autumnal Ode* was noticed in a footnote. He was "not entirely satisfied" with De Vere's spiritual poems, he called the doctrinal sonnets obscure, and to "the arid civil servant", as Harold Nicolson deservedly designated him in his work on *Tennyson*[40]), it seemed

[38]) *The Academy*, 25 January, 1902.
[39]) Cf. Th. R. Lounsbury, *The Life and Times of Tennyson*, 1915; p. 427.
[40]) Harold Nicolson, *Tennyson*, 1923; p. 22.

that most of the songs were in a vein of two or three hundred years ago. And in what style this stuff was written any one may judge from the following sentence in which the reviewer 'praised' *The Year of Sorrow:* "But though it is more easy to represent in a manner to affect the feelings, a fabulous than a real catastrophe, and a catastrophe to an individual than one which has fallen upon a nation, yet when the way *is* found to bear in upon the mind the wider and matter-of-fact tragedy, the tragic effect is rather deepened than flattened by vastness and reality of the theme". This is not the only enigmatic sentence which gives an impression of Taylor's critical power; here is another example of his lucid way of expression: "Of the few of Mr. De Vere's sonnets which are amatory, it may be said that if there is felt to be a passion in them it is rather because the passion is felt to be suppressed than because it is felt to be declared; and the force they certainly possess is due perhaps to a certain realizing plainness in the enunciation of the relations of feelings which are the subject". There were critics who took this twaddle to be an estimate of De Vere's poetry, for instance, 'The Bookworm' in *The Academy,* who referred to it. We suspect that Miles, too, relied on it for his selection of De Vere's poetry (contributed to Mackenzie Bell's *Selections,* 1891), for the poems he gave were almost the same as those quoted by Taylor. Like Taylor, this critic noted 'diffuseness' as De Vere's chief fault, "a diffuseness, the presence of which is felt not so much in particular lines and phrases as in entire passages". He misunderstood the *May Carols,* and from him Professor Hugh Walker[41]), Floris Delattre[42]), and others, may have got their idea of mysticism in De Vere's poetry.

How different in character and warmth were nearly all the other criticisms. Even Professor Henry Morley's article in *The Nineteenth Century* (February, 1878), though it consisted mainly in an exact enumeration of De Vere's publications up to that year, was better calculated to serve the poet's interests. This critic appeared to have a preference for the dramatic works of both father and son, but he also recognised in Aubrey's shorter poems "the presence of fine taste, generous temper, and a noble aim". Of the lyrical poems especially *The Search after Proserpine* appealed to him, of which he wrote: "A reader who cares really for poetry, knows when the song is true, and has an ear for all the varieties of singing, will find the genius

[41]) Hugh Walker, *The Age of Tennyson,* Bell & Sons; 1921, p. 261.
[42]) Floris Delattre, *De Byron à Francis Thompson;* 1913, p. 189.

of Aubrey de Vere well represented in this book". This short, but fully appreciative criticism appeared, it may be noted, almost simultaneously with that of the poet's best friend.

Perhaps the most enthusiastic in his praise was the anonymous writer who published an essay on 'The Poetry of the De Veres' in *The Quarterly Review* (vol. 183; 1896 pp. 318-339). He, too, was an admirer of the dramatic qualities in the works of the father and the son, apparently, just as in Morley's case, under the influence of Richard Holt Hutton's review in *The Spectator*. Like Morley, he took both together, not only because it was natural to speak of them together, but also because, in his opinion, they represented "the highest reach in the present century of the drama of action and the drama of thought". He compared *Mary Tudor*, as an example of the drama of action, with *Alexander*, as the best type of the intellectual play, and he concluded that, although the honours in the dramatic art of the nineteenth century were also to be divided with Browning and Taylor, yet "to the De Veres the future will confirm the laurel". In dealing with their non-dramatic poetry his admiration was hardly less. He called both of them original authors and masters in the art of writing sonnets and songs; only, he placed the son, as the truer poet, above the father and next to Browning in fulness of vitality and wealth of ideas. But what made the work of the son most valuable to him was that it inspired joyful hope, that it glowed with the unquenchable fire of unquestioning faith, and that it offered the ancient Christian truths to an age of pessimism and materialism. As a teacher of these truths he ranked De Vere above all living poets. He regretted that this ennobling power of his poetry was not sufficiently brought out in the existing anthologies of his works, and he declared that, "were a judicious selection made from Mr. De Vere's poetry — neither of the two already published seem to us in all respects satisfactory —, we are confident that the critic of the future would view with some astonishment and contempt any verdict of the present which ranked before it a volume by any living writer". Clearly, this was the estimate and appreciation of a man who, if he was a poet as well as a critic, must have been one very much like De Vere himself.

The finest tributes paid to De Vere as a poet are, of course, the three selections from his poetry (we omit Miles's, because it is negligible in comparison with the others): the first published in 1890 by John Dennis (*Aubrey de Vere's Poems, A Selection*; Cassell & Co.

Ltd. London), the second in 1894 by G. E. Woodberry (*Selections from the Poems of Aubrey de Vere*; Macmillan & Co. London and New York), and the third in 1904 by Lady Margaret Domvile (*Poems from the Works of Aubrey de Vere*; compiled for The Catholic Truth Society, London). Perhaps Professor Woodberry's is richer than the other two, more varied, and more practical, qualities which seem to have given it a wider circulation. It also contains a preface in which the characteristics of De Vere's poetry are more fully exposed, whereas the preface to Lady Margaret Domvile's selection is little more than a memoir of the poet. John Dennis's preface is for the greater part a justification of his selection and a defence of the poet's aims. It is ably written and is particularly marked by the sympathetic judgment of one who, as the editor himself declared, could not accept all the dogmas of his poet's Church. Professor Woodberry attempted a general estimate of De Vere's poetic qualities and succeeded fairly well in enumerating the chief characteristics of the poet's works. He called special attention to such elements as the author's loyal surrender to a man or cause, the purity and the limpid sincerity of his verse, its clarifying power, the morning-air in De Vere's poetic world, and the poet's faith in the power of truth. He praised him, just as John Dennis had done, at the expense of Tennyson, and declared that De Vere had presented as a reality what to Shelley had been a vision or a dream.

It was through Woodberry's selection that De Vere's poetry became known in the Netherlands. M. A. P. C. Poelhekke chanced to read it and to this critic, himself a literary artist of high standing, the existence of such a poet as Aubrey de Vere was a revelation. His becoming acquainted with De Vere's poetry was love at first sight. He introduced him to his countrymen in an article (published in the monthly *De Katholiek*, vol. 116; 1899) which was as much inspired by enthusiasm as that of the critic in *The Quarterly Review*. It was not an elaborate criticism of De Vere's poetical works; in it no mention was made of the sonnets and the songs, and the dramas were just referred to. But Poelhekke wanted to represent the poet first of all in the capacity in which he admired him most, namely, as a specific Catholic writer. Being himself an ardent Catholic, he was strongly attracted by the spirit in which the Irish Legends and the Saints' Lives were written, and in his flowery, somewhat stilted style he described what a wonderful land of poetry De Vere had disclosed to his readers, especially to Catholic readers. Of the Irish Legends

Poelhekke praised the story of *Queen Maeve* most. But he also wanted to give to his countrymen an impression of De Vere's beautiful character; and, surely, no man could have been honoured more than De Vere was in being compared to Poelhekke's father. This fine poetic passage, which is remembered by every one who was guided to De Vere's poetry by Poelhekke's article, was perhaps the strongest proof of the critic's deep reverence for the English poet's personality and his verse.

Perhaps the truest and most accurate estimates of De Vere's poetical nature were given by Wilfrid Meynell and Francis Thompson at the time of the poet's death. These two critics had known him during his lifetime, they were thoroughly acquainted with all his works, of which they had keenly felt the weaknesses as much as they had been aware of the merits, and there was nothing particular in their relations with him to influence their judgment. True, they were his friends and his co-religionists; but they were not carried away by enthusiasm, both of them having outgrown Victorian ideas and tastes. For them De Vere was already a poet of the past and they judged him from a neutral standpoint. On the whole their criticism was not unfavourable. Their articles were written in a tone of sympathy, Thompson's being perhaps less coloured by that kindliness which marked Meynell's, and both critics spoke with reverence of the poet's ideals. In their eyes De Vere was at his best in his lyrics, as a writer of odes in the Wordsworthian style, not as a writer of sonnets and songs. But they denied him a place among the great poets. Francis Thompson declared that "Aubrey de Vere does not deserve the tranquil neglect into which he has passed"; but he was emphatic in classing him no higher than a derivative poet.

III. THE EVEN TENOR OF DE VERE'S PROSE-WRITINGS

a. Occasional Criticism

When Aubrey de Vere entered upon his literary career he meant to be a poet, as his father had been. That such was his aspiration he had already confessed at the age of seventeen to his friend, Sir William Rowan Hamilton, and his first two publications are there to prove that his mind on this point was fixed. He never changed it throughout his life. He regarded himself as a poet by profession and he kept writing poetry from 1832 till 1893. In his own view it was in this capacity that he corresponded and conversed with his friends about the works of the great English masters and he even attributed to the poetical element in his literary nature the fact that his conversion to the Catholic Church had been so long delayed. In 1852 he wrote to Sara Coleridge: "I should probably have been a Catholic years ago, if I had not been in some sort a poet, and had a poetical predilection for the vague in thought, and the vagabond in life"[1]). Truly, it was De Vere's firm conviction that he was first of all a poet, and he thought that so much would be clear also to all his contemporaries. He would have stared if any one had seriously asked him at the end of his life what he had deemed to be his real calling, and he would have pointed to the many volumes of poetry he had produced, numerous enough in number to fill the larger part of a bookshelf. And indeed, none of his friends would have dreamed of looking on him from another angle.

Yet, to say that Aubrey de Vere was exclusively a poet, or even that this was the office which was most congenial to him, would be wrong. There was another element in his literary nature, viz. his critical sense, and the very character of his poetry proved that this

[1]) *Memoir*, p. 212.

was as strong as the poetical. It predominated in the controversial poems directed against Liberalism, in the attacks against Rome, in the many political sonnets; and in his later poetry it was never quite absent. He wrote many dedicatory poems, e.g. to Coleridge, to Wordsworth, to Newman, to Tennyson, to Manning, to Browning, which were all to some extent appreciations of the great men of his time. But we need not turn to his poems for evidence of his critical sense. His prose-writings run parallel with his poetry and they are all one great manifestation of it: his essays, his pamphlets, letters, diaries, editions, recollections, and even the prefaces which he prefixed to every volume of poetry he published. The mass of his prose is as bulky as that of his verse and shows by its variety of forms his critical power in all its aspects. Roughly, De Vere's work as a critic is divisible into two parts: his occasional or unmethodical criticism, consisting of letters, diaries, recollections, etc.; and his systematic criticism in the form of essays.

The forms of occasional criticism lie scattered over De Vere's whole career. One of them, the Preface, appears quite regularly with every publication of a poetical volume and sometimes it runs into a considerable length, notably the one in the volume of *Irish Odes*, in which De Vere discusses the expression of "true passion" in the work of Wordsworth, Milton, and Dante; and also those in the volumes of *Legends*. The diary which he kept runs from 1845 to 1846. But the earliest evidence of his critical spirit is to be found in the letters which he wrote at the age of seventeen and eighteen to Sir William Rowan Hamilton. They exhibit a mind in which the faculty to analyse the real qualities of great men of letters and to compare their achievements with other great men, is already remarkably developed. With a keenness of perception, extraordinary for his years, he discussed in them alike such subjects as the function of poetry and the superiority of the Greek dramatists to all the modern poets, or dwelt on the merits of works that usually are reserved for a maturer age, as e.g. Coleridge's *Aids to Reflection* and Schiller's *Die Ideale*. Naturally the taste displayed in these letters had not yet the refinement which only experience of maturer years can give, — with all the prejudice of a boy he looked on Latin poetry with disfavour — but the soundness of his views set forth in the treatment of such ambitious subjects raised expectations that he would be a critic of more than ordinary power.

It was towards the close of his Anglican period that De Vere as a

critic came for the first time before the public. In 1848 he published *English Misrule and Irish Misdeeds*, in 1849 he wrote an article in the *Edinburgh Review* on Tennyson's *The Princess*, and in 1850 he brought out *Picturesque Sketches of Greece and Turkey*. Strictly speaking, the beginning of his critical labours must be dated one year before the appearance of his pamphlet, for in 1847 he had edited his father's drama *Mary Tudor*. It is true that the publication of it was more a performance of filial duty than a critical enterprise; but he wrote an introduction to it, consisting of a *Memoir* of Sir Aubrey de Vere and a preface to the dramatic subject, and although neither is criticism in its purest and most impartial form, both are in some way an expression of De Vere's critical sense and show the development of his power in its earliest stage. Especially the preface is instructive in this respect: it is the first illustration of De Vere's method as a critic to study a certain subject from various sources and master it as fully as possible before pronouncing an opinion on it. With characteristic conscientiousness he had consulted several authorities on the history of Mary Tudor before setting about to write this introduction, among them being Dr. Maitland, Bp. Francis Godwin, Fuller, Camden, Collier, Bp. Burnet, Hallam, Lingard, and Miss Strickland. His pamphlet on the Irish famine is another example of thorough preparation; it was "severely handled" by critics for the unionistic views defended in it, but many readers were impressed by the authority with which the writer could speak of the historical past both of England and of Ireland.

Besides writing and reading poetry De Vere had devoted a large part of the years following his college-days to study. He took a great interest in the history of the two countries with which he was so closely connected and from the works of their most gifted men he gained those principles of thought and judgment which made him at the same time their disciple and an independent thinker. His fellow-countryman, Edmund Burke, was his favourite master, and among the philosophers of England he acknowledged several, from Lord Bacon to those of his own days, as teachers of the important principles, religious, political, and social, which were to govern his future life and thought. However, he did not rank all of them equally high. He was a critic in his studies and it characterizes his discernment as well as his independence of thought that he set little store by some of Bacon's theories.

From his *Recollections* we know that about this time he also stu-

died theology and that his mind was largely occupied with the subject of religion. Part of the progress he had made in these matters is reflected in the two volumes in which he described his tour through Greece and Turkey. *Picturesque Sketches* is a book of travel on the same lines as the numberless other works of travel that had appeared in England since the days of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. Especially in the 19th century they were very numerous and, even in poetry, travel-description was an important element. Wordsworth, Landor, Shelley, Leigh Hunt, and Byron, are only a few names of poets who wrote about their travels; and De Vere was not less prolific in this kind of poetry than any of them, witness his many sonnets and odes on Italy, Greece, Turkey, and Switzerland. *Picturesque Sketches* is the orderly and minute account of his nine months' stay in the Levant. It abounds in descriptions of places, manners, buildings, and monuments, and is a storehouse of historical, political, and geographical details about the Eastern countries. But there are many passages in which De Vere's thoughts stray for a moment from the actual scene before him to other climes and other times. Here the critic steps in, the man who analyses, who judges, and who points out the characteristic qualities of the objects of his contemplation by comparing them with each other. Both Greece and Turkey were countries rich in reminiscences of a glorious past and offered plenty of food to De Vere's philosophical mind. They had made a history not only for themselves, but also for the world. Religion was his favourite theme in the contemplation of their fallen greatness, and comparisons between the vicissitudes of Islam and the overthrow of Heathenism in ancient Greece, or the rise of Christendom, occur very frequently in the book. To his mind religion was the central point in the history of man, and his thoughts were always reverting to it, whether he discussed Greek literature, Greek art, Greek philosophy, Greek policy, or Turkish conquests. He also regarded it as a mirror, in which the character of a people is reflected by its attitude towards Faith. He often tried to point out the relations, the differences, and the analogies between the various scenes he beheld, and he sometimes surprises the reader by the acuteness of his perception, as e.g. in the passage which represents in its most general form the outlook of De Vere as a Northerner on Grecian beauty. In his essays he was to analyse this impression of difference in 'mood' between the North and the South, and to extend the analogy between nature and the character of the Greek people to their literature and their art.

The article in the *Edinburgh Review* (vol. XC; Oct. 1849) on Tennyson's *The Princess* was De Vere's first attempt at literary criticism. From his youth his poetical mind had been captured by the peculiar charm of the Tennysonian verse and more than once already he had expressed, in his letters to his friends or in conversation, the enthusiasm with which its elegance and rich imagery filled him. It was not merely the occasion of the poet's latest publication that made De Vere resort to the columns of the Whig quarterly: *The Princess* had appeared nearly two years before. Nor could it have been mainly his admiration for this particular poem, for the garb in which De Vere saw it then, did not raise it above several poems of Tennyson's volume of 1842. It was not yet embellished by the lyrics which gave it its final form. The chief motive that led De Vere to the writing of this article was that he grieved to see how long his idol was in winning popularity. Since the appearance of his first poems Tennyson had suffered severe criticism at the hands of detractors, such as Christopher North (John Wilson), W. Jerdan, and John Lockhart, criticism that would have left no poet indifferent, but which particularly told on Tennyson's sensitive nature. For ten years he had remained silent and De Vere had often been a witness of moods in Tennyson in which he raged against the whole world, giving vent to his fury by stamping the floor of his room! After 1842 the tide had begun to turn, though slowly; Tennyson's friends were more zealous than ever in praising him and even some of the old enemies were coming round, as e.g. John Lockhart[2]). But in De Vere's eyes the praise was all too grudgingly given, and when with the publication of *The Princess* the old charges of 'affectation of language', 'obscurity', and 'want of profound reflectiveness' were revived, he deemed it his duty as a friend to encourage Tennyson by expressing his unbounded admiration.

This aim defined the whole character of the review. It was a eulogy on Tennyson the poet rather than a scientific study of the poem itself. Of analysis of *The Princess* the article contained next to nothing; De Vere did not enter into details, but kept his discussion general, drawing also earlier poems within the scope of his subject. As for shortcomings in Tennyson's poetry he admitted only those that were the most venial in a poet, but he took care that faultiness should not be the final impression. Praise was the keynote of the criticism and De Vere bestowed it on Tennyson's genius in the most extravagant

[2]) See Andrew Lang, *Alfred Tennyson;* English Men of Letters Series, 1901; p. 22.

terms that friendship could suggest. The American Professor Th. R. Lounsbury certainly did not overstate De Vere's share in the commendation of Tennyson's poetry, when he wrote in his admirable work, *The Life and Times of Tennyson* (which unfortunately remained unrevised): "With the progress of time the contemporary praise of *The Princess* was more and more loudly expressed. It may be said to have culminated in Aubrey de Vere's review, in which excessive laudation of the work as a whole was mingled with the scantiest measure of criticism of details".

The intrinsic value of De Vere's article is of course very little. It is not literary criticism in the proper sense and one would be disposed to lump it with the many other contemporary 'reviews' that only served to write a poet up or cry him down. Yet, as his first attempt at criticism in periodicals it is not without interest as regards the critical principles embodied in De Vere's later work. Suffice it to observe that his first subject concerned a poet, an English poet, and moreover, that his criticism was favourable.

Among the various forms of De Vere's occasional and unscientific criticism his letters occupy, perhaps, the most important place. With his *Recollections* and his *Diaries* they have in common that they are one of the principal sources of biographical information about him and at the same time a mirror in which the spirit of his age is faithfully reflected; but whereas in the first two species of prose-writing the reader is mainly concerned with disconnected details and always keeps moving within the world of their author's memory, the third frequently carries him out of it, and presents to his mind not only statements and facts, but all friendly relations. This applies to letters in general. They convey a greater sense of actuality than any other prose-form and have, therefore, always ranked high as an independent part of literature.

In the 19th century letter-writing assumed formidable proportions. Nearly every literary man to whom friendly relations were of any value maintained a more or less busy correspondence and bequeathed to literature a set of letters of proportionate bulk. With the most gifted among them letter-writing became an art, as e.g. with Southey, Byron, Shelley, and Keats. Of Byron the *Quarterly Review* remarked in 1830, with respect to his letters, that "had his life been prolonged, he would have taken his place in the very first rank of our prose literature"; and a year later the *Edinburgh Review* expressed a similar opinion when writing that his correspondence "was a rare and admir-

able instance of that highest art, which cannot be distinguished from nature". In the case of Keats, whose letters are of a different nature and much more important than Byron's, of Shelley, and of Southey, their respective critics have as often and as enthusiastically praised the powerful style, the elegance, the easy flow, or some other prominent quality of their letters. With these men the writing of letters was not merely a vehicle for communicating thoughts, but they rather considered the composition of them as the performance of a literary act, as an exercise of their talent in the moulding of language. And many a gem of cultivated prose was produced by their efforts.

Some critics want us to believe that in the Victorian era the art of letter-writing was on the decline. Francis H. Groome, for instance, who contributed the article on Edward FitzGerald to *Chambers's Cyclopaedia of English Literature,* spoke to this effect, and Professor Dowden, who edited Henry Taylor's *Correspondence* in 1888, took an even more pessimistic view when he wrote in his introduction to this edition that the art of letter-writing "was now almost lost". It is hard to agree with these critics, for their assertion is not in keeping with the facts. The Victorian age counted a host of letter-writers: Aubrey de Vere, Henry Taylor, Edward FitzGerald, Sara Coleridge, Coventry Patmore, Matthew Arnold, Rossetti, to name some off-hand; and as for their success in the art, there are several among them who owe a large part of their fame as prose-writers to this form, e.g. Edward FitzGerald, who is regarded by many as the prince of letter-writers.

About the middle of the century letter-writing was certainly as characteristic a feature of English literary life as it was in the Augustan age or in Keats's time. It had almost become a fashion to keep up a regular correspondence. Nor was it the privilege of literary circles only. No less a person than the Queen herself spent a considerable portion of her leisure hours on this occupation, and for those of the higher classes who felt time hanging heavy on their hands letter-writing was a pleasant pastime. Indeed, when surveying the long list of works entitled *Life and Correspondence of,* all of them bearing on Victorians, one would almost be inclined to say that De Vere would have lost much of his character as a typical Victorian, if he had not been an ardent letter-writer. In this respect he was far more representative of his age than, for instance, Tennyson, who did not write much in the way of letters.

De Vere's letters are numerous. They stretch from his seventeenth

year to the time when "friends in London forbore to correspond when they noticed what pains and erasures the replies had cost the hand that faltered, the memory that failed"[3]). They fill the larger part of Wilfrid Ward's biggish *Memoir,* and yet the collection is not complete. Several of them were omitted by the biographer because it seemed to him superfluous to publish them all in cases when two or three sufficed for his purpose of illustrating a particular trait in De Vere's life; while others were not reprinted because they had already appeared in other works, e.g. in the *Life of Sir William Rowan Hamilton* and *Henry Taylor's Correspondence.* There are also some which seem to have escaped Ward's notice, notably those in *Sidelights on the Oxford Movement.* But, however much it is to be regretted that no complete and separate edition of De Vere's correspondence exists, the body of those preserved to us is interesting enough and makes at least two characteristics of Victorian letter-writing conspicuous: De Vere's letters are inordinately long and they have a plentiful lack of humour. If Cowper's were quite as long, they were much more humorous, and they wound in and out among light, pleasant matters, as De Vere's do but infrequently.

For all their seriousness De Vere's letters never approach, however, to the homiletic character. Not in a single instance do they become tedious, but afford pleasant reading, constantly arresting the reader's attention by their thoughtfulness and fluency of style. Of course, we must allow for the civilities with which letters usually begin or end; De Vere was every inch an aristocrat and the least attention bestowed upon him, from the sending of a book to the present of a photograph or a single flower, was sure to call forth the most eloquent expression of his gratitude. To lop off these seeming trivialities would be injuring the letters badly; for much of their charm would be lost by this process and something essential in De Vere as a correspondent would be taken away. Indeed, it is in these parts of his letters that the sweetness of his character, with its constant regard for sympathy, attentions, and comfort of others, is best seen.

From a strictly literary point of view De Vere's letters must be interesting to every lover of manly prose. They are written in that cultivated style which characterizes all his works and which captivates the reader by its stateliness and accuracy of expression. There is rarely, if ever, a sentence in them that puzzles the reader on account of faulty construction or misusage of words, as is more than

[3]) W. Meynell's article in *The Athenaeum,* 25 January, 1902.

once the case in Henry Taylor's prose. De Vere's grammatical feeling was seldom at fault and his rich vocabulary never left him in the lurch. His sentences may be rather long sometimes, especially when he was writing on his favourite subjects, religion and politics, but they always move onward fluently and majestically, with here and there a tinge of rhetoric. With De Vere letter-writing was as much an art as with the Romantics. Who could doubt it after having read that beautiful letter which he sent to Mrs. Edward Villiers in 1851, pleading for her friendship after his conversion? It is printed in Ward's *Memoir* (pp. 191-195), and may be ranked among the best specimens of stately prose and dignified language.

The critical element is perhaps the most generally important in the letters. From his youth it had been De Vere's fervent wish to come into personal contact with the leading men of his time and his first journeys to England were made chiefly for this purpose. He never wearied of describing the parties to which he was invited and of giving his impressions of those he met there. With a few graphic strokes he gave to his sister the following sketch of Richard Whately, Archbishop of Dublin, whom he met at a party of clergymen in Dublin, 1835: "The Archbishop lectured them, generally about practical matters, sometimes about doctrinal, in a style so characterized by originality, rapidity, and fearlessness, that the rest used now and then to stare at each other a little, and always to halt behind in a most lamentable manner. Now and then some one would oppose him; upon which the Archbishop would come down upon him in all the pride and power of Logic and Rhetoric, and roll him over as a greyhound rolls over the little dogs in play. He certainly possesses all the inferior qualities in a combination and perfection that is almost miraculous; whether he possesses the higher in any degree is a question which I should be afraid of deciding"[4]). With even greater keenness of insight into the real value of a man he depicted Macaulay in a letter of the year 1845 and gave an estimate of the historian's mind and character which was many years ahead of the general appreciation in his time: "It (Macaulay's mind) has also a self-confidence which belongs to narrowness, and an utter inappreciation of all matters which it cannot wield and twist about, but which greatly increases his energy and apparent force; but I could observe in it no trace of originality, depth, breadth, elevation, subtlety, comprehensiveness, spirituality — in one word, none of the attributes of greatness. He

[4]) *Memoir*, p. 14-15.

is however a strong man, and will do his day's work honestly, before his day is done. I should think he despises falsehood, and likes, if not Truth, at least the exhilaration of a hunt after Truth, or the animation of the battle for the cause of Truth" [5]). With the same freedom of opinion he disapproved of the too strong element of manliness in Elizabeth Barrett Browning's poems or stated his dislike of the liberal spirit among the Cambridge sages. In the letters there is a picture of almost every man or woman who was connected with the literary, religious, or political movements of the time, and most of them are drawn with that vividness which characterizes the keen observer. The best of them are found in the early letters, in which we meet De Vere's contemporaries for the first time: Carlyle, "inveighing bitterly against Lord Brougham and 'oratory', pronouncing them both the merest shams"; Wordsworth, who struck Aubrey as "the kindest and most simple-hearted old man I know, and talking from the rising up of the sun to the going down of the same"; Taylor, "very (I think remarkably) handsome, and the most *stately* person I ever saw"; Tennyson, "crooning his magnificent elegies" to his audience, amid a cloud of tobacco smoke in the small hours of the night; Newman, whom De Vere describes as "the most monkish-looking man I ever saw — very dignified, very ascetical, and so very humble and gentle in manner that it would almost have the air with which the Jesuits are reproached, if it were not accompanied by an equally remarkable simplicity" [6]); Spedding, sitting with Aubrey "for hours"; Pusey, of whom Aubrey recorded on May 14, 1845: "He approached the subject of Newman three or four times, and glanced away again. At last he spoke of his change as certain, said it had been going on for these seven years, and would be avowed this year; said it would be a great crisis, and by far the greatest blow the cause had received"; Sara Coleridge, "a most singularly beautiful as well as attractive person — with great blue eyes, into which Coleridge looked down till he left there his own lustre"; Manning, whose "marvellous union of grace, decisiveness, and sanctity" made Aubrey think that "a saint of old had stepped out of a picture by Raphael, or Perugino"; Hutton, by Aubrey spoken of as "a quite unique individuality, alike in his simple, devoted, and absolutely unworldly character, and in his massive and somewhat mystical intellect"; and a great number of the lesser gods and goddesses. In his later correspondence the company is less crow-

[5]) *Memoir*, p. 75.
[6]) ibid., pp. 31-32.

ded: De Vere began to live more and more in the past or else his thoughts occupied themselves mostly with religious and political questions, such as the agnosticism in England and Jacobinism in Ireland. His literary interests, although never losing their hold upon him, began to give way to the more acute problems of the second half of the century. It was the time when the poet in him was being supplanted by the essayist.

De Vere's volume of *Recollections* (Edward Arnold; London, 1897) stands at the close of his literary career as a storehouse of all those odds and ends that could not well have found a place in his other writings and yet were interesting enough in his eyes to be recorded. Several of them relate to himself: to his youth, to his conversion, to his poems, and to relatives, of whom especially his father is remembered. The book is not an autobiography, however. De Vere was a man who disliked to talk much of himself, either in prose or in verse, and even in his *Recollections* he stuck to his principle that "self is a dangerous personage to let into one's book". Nor was it a great loss that he forbore to write one; it is true that the account of his early years with its many folklore sketches, of his travels, and of his experiences, makes pleasant reading, the more so as it is interspersed with many anecdotes and Irish bulls (which shows that he was not altogether devoid of humour), but the story of his life proper is soon told and is sufficiently clear from his letters.

We must be grateful to De Vere for his modesty; for whoever could have wished to hear a few more details about his unchequered life at the risk of losing such fine sketches as he gives of Gerald Griffin, the writer of *The Collegians,* or of the discussions in Parliament on the Maynooth Grant, and of O'Connell? Gerald Griffin was a talented young man, who joined the religious community of the Christian Brothers and who died at an early age, thereby frustrating the hopes of his friends that "he might have given to Irish literature an Irish Burns or an Irish Walter Scott", as De Vere expressed it. In youth he had been a friend of De Vere's, who always remembered his amiable character and the promising power of his works with loving tenderness. O'Connell is represented as the witty and mighty uncrowned king of Ireland in the days of his fame; and De Vere's description of the proceedings in Parliament sitting over the Maynooth Grant is another contribution to the history of Ireland hardly less interesting. The picture he gives of two influential speakers in the discussion, Dr. Whately, Archbishop of Dublin, and Dr. Phillpotts, Bishop of

Exeter, is a livelier one than even Hansard's *Parliamentary Debates* could convey. The book abounds with such pictures and it is from this renunciation of all selfish ends that De Vere's *Recollections* derive their importance as a work of criticism.

Of Wordsworth, his great literary friend, little is said in the *Recollections*. Out of deference De Vere had devoted a separate chapter to him in his volume of Essays and he now confined himself to recording such little traits of his master as he remembered from his daily intercourse with him, e.g. the vision of seeing him at night prayers "kneeling near Mrs. Wordsworth with his face in his hands". But all the more elaborate are his descriptions of the other men and women whom he had known or whose works he had reflected on: Scott, Burns, Milton, and Dante (the latter two he compared with each other), Miss Fenwick, Sara Coleridge, and Hartley Coleridge. The latter is graphically described as follows: "It was a strange thing to see Hartley Coleridge fluctuating about the room, now with one hand on his head, now with both arms expanded like a swimmer's. There was some element wanting in his being. He could do everything but keep his footing, and doubtless in his inner world of thought, it was easier for him to fly than to walk, and to walk than to stand. There seemed to be no gravitating principle in him. One might have thought he needed stones in his pockets to prevent his being blown away". The references to Sir William Rowan Hamilton and to Henry Taylor are, of course, very numerous. To write about these friends was a favourite subject with De Vere and many of his remarks on them have, just as in the case of Tennyson and Patmore, been thankfully made use of by their biographers.

But perhaps the most important chapters of the book are those on Newman and Manning. They deal with two men whose lives and works have for many years been a subject of universal study and about whose personalities the world has been willing to hear more ever since the time when their conversion to the Catholic Church and their subsequent position in that communion occasioned a sharp controversy between friendly and hostile critics. De Vere's chapters do not pretend to the name of scientific studies: beyond his remark that he thought Richard Hutton's the best book on Newman no other biographical work is mentioned by name; they are only a series of reminiscences and impressions, arranged in a more or less connected form. But besides supplying a few details that are not generally known, they have the interest of being an attempt at clearing Newman

and Manning from certain charges and of being a defence written by a critic who must be deemed as competent a judge on the subject as any other before or after him, since he was a convert himself and had known both of them intimately from the days of the Oxford Movement. De Vere had been Newman's almost daily companion when the Catholic University was started and had travelled as well as corresponded with Manning. His aptitude to understand the difficulties of their souls' life fully and his lifelong friendship with them lends a value to his analyses which is unique in the literature on Newman and Manning.

To this intercourse with them we owe the many reminiscences that lie scattered over the pages. He had seen Newman attending Prof. Eugene O'Curry's lectures on Irish archaeology, he knew that Newman bought a library with the proceeds of Tract 90, he had talked with him on the possibility of Dr. Pusey and Keble being converted and remembered Newman's remark that "dear Pusey never knew when he burned" on his way to Rome, the metaphor being a reference to the game of 'hot and cold'; he also heard him say that *Callista* was written chiefly with a pencil in railway-carriages during a continental tour and that the *Dream of Gerontius* owed its preservation to an accident. In the same manner he had gathered what were Manning's literary tastes, he knew the scandals reported about him when he was in Rome, and had been present when a bag was stolen from Manning at Avignon. On this occasion he had seen the expression of grief in the neophyte's face, for the bag contained some letters which were very dear to him (most probably they were the correspondence with his wife) and he had heard him remark that "the loss was probably necessary — necessary to sever all bonds to earth". No doubt many of these reminiscences are of different value and the stories of the prelude of the Oxford Movement, of Tract 90, of the Jerusalem Bishopric, of Littlemore, of the Gorham question, and other episodes, were known before De Vere gave an account of them; but he thought they might be interesting to biographers.

The quintessence of the chapters is, however, the defence of his two friends. From the vantage-ground of his old age he saw what were the main points at issue in the controversy and what were the common charges brought against them. Newman had been represented as a convert who was received by the Church of Rome with distrust and who chafed under her yoke. His enemies had called special attention to the fact that he had failed in most of his enterprises and that

for a great mind he had been "slow in making the discovery of the true Church". De Vere admitted that Newman's attempts to found a Catholic University and to translate the Bible had not been successful and he explained why failure was inevitable (Such a writer as J. Elliot Ross might have saved himself the trouble of writing about Newman's five failures, in his book *John Henry Newman* 1933, if he had read De Vere's *Recollections*!). But he repudiated any accusation tending to call Newman's integrity in question. He described his character as marked by humility, refinement, sympathy, and loyalty to the Church, and declared that especially in his attitude towards the doctrine of Papal Infallibility (1870) Newman had been misrepresented. Shortly before the dogma was defined he had talked with Newman on the subject and remembered him saying: "People are talking about the definition of the Papal Infallibility as if there were and could be but one such definition. Twenty definitions of the doctrine might be made, and of these several might be perfectly correct, and several others might be *Exaggerated* and incorrect". De Vere knew that Newman viewed the real definition as belonging "to that class of definitions which, six months before it was put forth, Newman had spoken of to me as being perfectly correct. As he has been much misrepresented on this subject, I deem it a duty to him to record that conversation" [7]). It is interesting to compare this view reported of Newman with the exposition of his attitude towards the 'Maximalisten', given by Dr. W. H. v. d. Pol in his masterly analysis, *De Kerk in het Leven en Denken van Newman* (Nykerk, 1936; p. 285). De Vere also analysed Newman's thinking-power, comparing his logical faculty and his imagination with Dr. Ward's, one of the 'Ultramontanes'; but with respect to Newman's "slow discovery" he concluded that the mind, the will, and heavenly grace were different things and that the process of conversion was not an intellectual movement only. In this passage De Vere seemed to write his own Apologia.

The estimate of Manning's personality in the second chapter is perhaps even more valuable, for Manning was a self-contained man, with a cast of the stoic about him, who was not very communicative about his inner life to others, not even to his friends; and of these he had only few. His enemies had accused him of cold-heartedness and had branded him as an ambitious schemer, who professed liberal opinions in order that he might attain his ends the more easily. On the other hand, his conversion was regarded by many as the deed of

[7]) *Recollections*, pp. 274-275.

a man "acting under the influence of temper, or precipitately". De Vere's impression of Manning's character was quite different. What enemies had called cold-heartedness had struck him as extreme intellectual self-possession and self-control, and it was his conviction that "a great cause, rather than any individual man, was that which drew out the strongest ardours of Manning's nature. He might easily have preferred the interests of a great friend to his own; but he would certainly have preferred that of a great cause to that of either self or friend. His human affections concentrated themselves on a few, while to the many beyond these he gave respect rather than admiration and a helpful and benevolent regard rather than ardent sympathies". Most of the other imputations De Vere called equally erroneous, especially the one of Manning being ambitious. With reference to two of the greatest events in Manning's life, his promotion to the Archbishopric of Westminster and his being created Cardinal, De Vere declared that Manning had neither sought nor desired the one or the other and he published two notes from Manning to prove it. He regarded his rise in the Hierarchy as an inevitable career for a man like Manning, to whom he attributed that union of qualities which must lead to eminence. What these qualities were De Vere explained in the following fragment, which is remarkable not only as a compendious estimate of Manning's personality, but also for the allusions to certain strained relations between Manning and others: "He was, at the same time, a man of great energy and of great circumspection. The practical qualities of a man of business were in him blended with the contemplative faculties necessary for the theologian. He had ardent convictions; but when events had finally taken a course opposed to them, he was not prevented by temper from accepting the inevitable and making the best of it. This was a thing the more easy for him because he did not attribute bad motives to opponents; he not only admitted, but constantly remembered how often men with equal sincerity and equal capacity see things from the most opposite points of view".

b. Religious and Ethical Essays

Although the letters, diaries, recollections, prefaces, and travel-descriptions constitute a large part of De Vere's prose-writings, his name as a literary critic chiefly rests upon the essays which he had written after 1865 and which he collected and re-published between 1887

and 1889. In contradistinction to the other forms they are the scientific portion of his work, the form in which he methodically treated of the subjects that interested him most, and in which learning and deep reflection guided his thoughts rather than impressions of the moment. In them he applied his principles as a critic most fully and set forth his views with all the power of his matured critical acumen.

The essays are all written in ripe manhood and bear the stamp of his extensive reading for many years. Unhampered in his professional work by the trammels of married life De Vere had been able in the quiet of Curragh Chase to devote his time largely to study and to enrich his mind with the mass of knowledge which science and literature had offered to the 19th century reader between the 'thirties and the 'eighties. He had mastered the works of all the great English poets and those of a good many inferior ones as well. Of Chaucer's language he had understood enough to be able to judge that Wordsworth's version of the Middle-English tales was superior to Dryden's, and to praise the popular Chaucer version of Keats's friend, Charles Cowden Clarke. He knew French sufficiently to read French works in the original, while in his college-days he had acquired a working knowledge of Latin and Greek. Of German, however, he confessed to be "totally ignorant"; nor does he appear to have known the old language of his native country.

But what did it matter when so many accurate translations were at his disposal by the time of 1887? The Victorian age was as much characterised by the activity of translators as the latter half of the 16th century. H. J. Munro, for instance, published his famous translation of Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura* (1864), Stephen de Vere did the same for Horace's *Odes*, Longfellow and Rossetti rendered fragments from Dante, while Edward FitzGerald won honour by his translations from Omar Kayám (1859-1868), Calderon, Aeschylus, and Sophocles. With most of the scholarly works produced in his time De Vere was acquainted and had registered for himself the value of each: he preferred the translation of Homer by the American classicist, Philip Worsley, to all others, as he did H. F. Cary's with respect to Dante. Of the studies on the early Italian author, to whom he felt strongly attracted, he had a preference for Dean Church's investigation and for Dr. Hettinger's, which he read in the translation of Father S. Bowden of the Oratory. Old Irish manuscripts had been made accessible in part by the zeal of Irish scholars, e.g. Prof. Eugene O'Curry, Prof. O'Looney, and W. Hennessy, whose renderings he read

in their handwriting. To this wide reading in literature he had added a fair knowledge of theology, philosophy, and metaphysics, and he had already proved himself an able controversialist in politics, so that at the time when the essays were composed his mind was equipped for the function of a critic in a measure such as few of his contemporaries could boast of.

There is a natural relation between the prose and the poetry of every man of letters. Basil Champneys noticed it in the writings of Coventry Patmore (*Memoir of Coventry Patmore;* vol. 2, pp. 3-4), Prof. Oliver Elton remarked on it when dealing with Matthew Arnold in *A Survey of English Literature* (vol. 1, p. 254), and nobody could fail to be struck by it in the work of poet-critics like Francis Thompson, Henry Taylor, and Swinburne. In De Vere's case the conformity is very striking. In his essays, as in his poetry, we see the man of many sympathies, of a profound religious and moral sense, of deep patriotic feeling, of great generosity of mind, so that to some extent the evidence they give of his literary talents will be a repetition of the characteristics already revealed by his poems. Of no writer might it be more truly said that his prose and his poetry form a whole. And yet, notwithstanding this close relation, the essays deserve to be considered separately, for they shed a luminous light of their own on the indefatigable fighter for ideals and on the friend of the poor, with his noble heart and unselfishness. Nor is this their only value. They bring us nearer to the persons and subjects to which his sympathies went out, the relations between his friends and him stand out in greater clearness and we get more intimately acquainted with the literary world in which his feelings and thoughts moved. They show us De Vere mainly as the connoisseur of the literary art.

The essays are twenty-five in number, if the two lectures, *The Personal Character of Wordsworth's Poetry* and *Some Remarks on Literature in its social aspects,* together with the chapter *Recollections of Wordsworth,* are included. For the greater part they had appeared before in a more expanded form in the *Edinburgh Review,* the *Quarterly Review,* the *Nineteenth Century,* the *Catholic World,* and other journals, from which they were collected in three volumes: *Essays, Literary and Ethical,* and *Essays, Chiefly on Poetry,* in two parts, to which collection some essays were added that had been newly written. Articles which no longer served their purpose, such as the one on Tennyson's *The Princess,* were left out. By the epithet 'ethical' the essays which deal with moral, religious, and even politi-

cal subjects, are distinguished from the purely literary ones, which makes a division into three groups obvious: the first set, which was clearly written under the influence of the clerical element in De Vere's nature, the second written by the politician, and the third, which was mainly the expression of the poet in him.

If called upon to decide between the relative importance of religion and literature, De Vere would certainly have given precedence to the first. Religion had always been uppermost in his mind and his poetry proves that he tried to serve Truth till death. His conversion had not affected his view of the poetic function in any way; it had given him, like Manning, "certainty and reality", but it did not turn him into an introspective mystic as happened with other poets of his time, nor did it lull him into the self-satisfaction that may come to a man who feels that he has gained personal security. On the contrary, his new religion inspired into him a strong desire to reach ever higher in his contemplation of spiritual truth and make his fellow-men share its beneficent influence. It is noteworthy that his first publication after his conversion was a booklet of a moral character, *Heroines of Charity* (Burns and Lambert, 1854), which contains records of the Sisters of Vincennes, Jean Biscot, Mlle. Le Gras, Madame De Miramion, Mrs. Seton, and the Little Sisters of the Poor. Although humble in its appearance and apparently in aim, it was the work in which De Vere entered upon his mission as a Catholic prose-writer, his first public attempt in prose to carry out his lay apostolate.

However, in his zeal for the Catholic Faith he soon changed this method of teaching by illustration, when the need of his time seemed to him to demand a stronger course. Shortly after the blow which Private Judgment had received during the 'forties, the old enemy of revealed truth had returned to the charge, this time in alliance with a new power, science, which had been making rapid progress. The rationalists exulted at the prospect which the combination of reason and science held out to them and they challenged their adversaries, the believers in Church-authority and Revelation, in a host of essays, articles, and pamphlets. The effect was fatal to many and unbelief was spreading fast in the second half of the century.

De Vere's religious essays were directed against this evil. He grappled with science as well as with Private Judgment, frequently taking both together, but dealing with them separately in *A few notes on Modern Unbelief*, and *Some Remarks on the Philosophy of the Rule of Faith*. The first essay had appeared as an introduction to a

work entitled *Proteus and Amadeus*, under which names the correspondence between two anonymous scholars of that time on religious and scientific subjects was edited by De Vere at the request of Newman, "who had no time for it". Proteus wrote in the supposed interests of science, while Amadeus (who may be identified with Dr. Meynell) came forward as a champion of revealed truth. De Vere had no other connection with this correspondence than that he supported Dr. Meynell's views of the claims of materialism. He did not disparage science: he honoured it as "one of God's greatest gifts to man"; but he warned against false scientific conclusions. He took Darwin's exposition of his discoveries as an example of the dangerous method frequently applied by scientists to arrange a mass of data in such a manner that some specious metaphysical truth was implied, and he remarked that if Darwin's writings were stripped of all irrelevant scientific details the proofs for the assertions of his disciples would appear to be very scanty. "A good table of contents might have exposed the fallacy". Nor did he attach much merit of originality to Darwin's work and he pointed to "Fathers and Schoolmen", such as St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas, as earlier discoverers of the physical laws of evolution. He also repudiated the claims of Private Judgment as a 'modern rule of faith', declaring that from the time when Elizabeth had dealt to her father's institution "the forty stripes save one" in the 39 articles, the legitimate character of Private Judgment had always been the same and that after having joined forces with science "it accorded to the individual no more than he possessed before, viz. the use of his own mental powers, and a right to pray for grace in the use of them".

De Vere's attitude towards science and Private Judgment is that taken up by every Christian believer, and his arguments against their claims do not differ much from those used before him by Newman and others. Still, his essays bear a distinctly personal mark, namely, the mark of his zeal to serve the cause of his new religion. They were not written in the first place for the theological scholar, but for the general public, especially for those of his contemporaries who were baffled by the sophisms of rationalism and yet had enough religious sense left to seek earnestly for light. De Vere did not believe in the use of controversy as a means to arrive at truth: one of his essays bears the significant title of *The Plague of Controversy*. He thought it more profitable to acquaint speculative Anglicans with the true meaning of the Catholic doctrines and to guide them in this manner to

his own religion. In some of these essays there is a faint attempt at literary criticism as e.g. in *A Saint,* which owed its subject to E. H. Thompson's *Life of St. Aloysius Gonzaga,* and in *The Great Problem of the Nineteenth Century,* which was written with reference to *Lux Mundi,* a collection of essays, published in 1889 by a group of Oxford students. This collection was admired by De Vere for the tone of reverence in which the Christian Faith was re-stated from the High Church point of view. But these works were only a starting-point for him. Not criticism, but popular exposition of the Catholic Faith was his real aim.

It is this quality of popular treatment which distinguishes his essays from most of the religious treatises of his time. They are not scientific in the sense in which Newman's controversial works may be called scientific, or even the *Theological Essays* of Richard Holt Hutton, who, as a disciple of F. D. Maurice, wrote in defence of rationalism. A comparison with any chapter of Newman's *Grammar of Assent,* for instance, or, perhaps better, a comparison between De Vere's *Modern Unbelief* and Hutton's *Science and Atheism,* which treats of the same subject — namely, whether Theism is capable of proof without the help of Revelation —, will show the difference in character and method. Newman and Hutton analysed their subject minutely, tried to ascertain truth in detail, and supported their views by quoting the opinions of many authorities on their side. De Vere, on the other hand, kept his discussions general, furnished simple illustrations, and did not worry the reader with references to foreign philosophers, such as Renan, Feuerbach, and Baur, whose names were known to only few Englishmen. His essays are marked by breadth and a wide sweep rather than by penetration, leaving details to the common sense of the every-day reader, for whom they were meant. It is this psychological element which gave them in the eyes of J. G. Wenham, who edited them in 1893 (*Religious Problems of the Nineteenth Century,* by J. G. Wenham), a practical value and which made him hope that "these essays, if read with care, will be found to enlarge the mind and enlighten the eyes of those who do not wish to be unbelievers, yet are drifting about in waters of speculation, not knowing which way to go or what to do".

Among the remaining 'ethical' essays there is one which carries us into a quite different field. It is called *The Human Affections in the Early Christian Time,* or *The Eremite Ambrosius his Epistle unto Marcella, A.D. 410.* It treats of the question whether the married

state is lower than the single life, and extols the beauty of love between husband and wife as the main source from which marriage derives its dignity and holiness. Domestic happiness was a favourite theme with De Vere and he had always taken an interest in works which were devoted to this subject. As late as 1897 he wrote on it in a preface to C. E. Burke's *Value of Life,* in which he gave it as his opinion that "the great empires of antiquity, especially that of Greece, the empire of the mind, perished for lack of virtuous and happy households".

But it is not so much its subject as its character that makes the epistle on *The Human Affections* one of the most remarkable pieces among De Vere's prose-writings. Its sub-title suggests that it is a translation of some patristic writing and to the unwary reader it will appear to be a very fine one. For, not only has De Vere succeeded in sustaining throughout the dignified style, which characterizes the best patristic literature of about 400, but he has also managed to infuse into it the real patristic spirit. In almost every respect the epistle reads as if it were a faithful rendering of some old manuscript, and we have known scholars well up in patristic literature mistaking it at first sight for a genuine translation. And yet, it is not a translation. The year 410 excludes St. Ambrose as De Vere's source and there is no 'eremite Ambrosius' on the records. Nor is it to be supposed that De Vere made a slip and confused his 'eremite' with St. Jerome, for he was too well acquainted with the history of the Fathers not to know that the latter did not live at that time in the neighbourhood of Rome, where names like Soracte, the Appenines, and the river Clytumnus, place us. Moreover, the eighteen-year old maiden, Marcella, in De Vere's tract could not be the same person as the Marcella in St. Jerome's epistle No. 46, *Ad Marcellam.* It is rather to be assumed that De Vere wittingly and wittily mixed up the names of the two sacred writers in the sub-title to tax the ingeniousness of the reader not too heavily. There is also the internal evidence. De Vere's 'eremite' sometimes represents the Church in a stage of development such as could only have been seen by a prophet or seer. Historians assure us that in 410 there were as yet no "rock-built citadels", no convents, in the West. Such ideas are anachronistic. Similarly anachronistic is the author's occasional indulgence in Nature-description in a way which would never have been that of the Fathers, e.g. at the close, where we read the following metaphorical apostrophe to Marcella: "Swan of the mountain-lake, that didst in

solitariness stem the black water under the granite peak, float thou never upon yellow Tiber; for Clytumnus leadeth also most placid and pure waters through the peaceful mead; and beside it grazeth the milk-white steer, and the bird singeth, and man doth build". Passages like these sound well in the mouth of a 16th or 19th century poet, but could hardly have flowed from the pen of a hermit in the first centuries. But it would be hard for any one to arrive at the conclusion that the epistle is a counterfeit on the internal evidence alone, for De Vere's anachronisms are by no means very salient.

For its artistic value, its purity of tone, its excellence of style, and its closeness of imitation, the epistle deserves to be ranked with the best specimens of *Belles-Lettres*. By its character it recalls to some minds, perhaps, Macpherson's 'Ossianic' poems and Chatterton's forgeries. Of course, a comparison with them would serve no practical purpose: the subjects which the three writers dealt with, their aims, and the circumstances under which they wrote, were too different in nature for that; but still, as an attempt at imitating a forgotten art De Vere's effort was not the least successful. His epistle shows what his imagination could do, especially when it was roused by his religious fervour, how thoroughly familiar his studies had made him with the grey past, and how congenial the atmosphere of living wisdom, which for ever clings to patristic literature, was to him. It also proves that at least the spirit of men like Macpherson and Chatterton was not dead in the nineteenth century, for in a certain sense De Vere was as much a forger as they.

c. Political Essays

Aubrey de Vere's attitude towards Ireland's difficulties about the middle of the nineteenth century is set forth in his pamphlet *English Misrule and Irish Misdeeds*. With the publication of this work, in 1848, he took part in the violent controversy which arose from that epoch-making event in Irish history, the Great Famine, which raged in Ireland from 1845 to 1850. The pamphlet treats of the relations between England and Ireland before and during the famine-years, and is a plea for reconciliation between these two countries. The book consists of four letters, which are addressed to the Speaker in the House of Commons in the form of a speech delivered in Parliament. What De Vere had to say was a matter that concerned all England. It was a charge brought by Ireland against England, the defence of

a country "which is not called upon, like private persons, when smitten on one cheek, to turn the other" (p. 4). In addressing himself to the representatives of the people Aubrey wanted to convince all England that it was not the Irish who were chiefly to blame for the fatal consequences of the famine, but that the discord between the two countries had its cause in the stepmotherly treatment which Ireland for more than six hundred years had experienced at the hands of England. By bringing this home to the English he wanted to induce them to consider and treat Ireland as an equal sister.

It was a work which required self-confidence. The many grievances of Ireland had been brought forward innumerable times by the writers in the Irish periodical *The Nation*, but in England their articles were all but ignored. Aubrey knew very well that everything coming from Ireland was condemned beforehand by the English, and, if he wanted to be heard, it was necessary to put his remonstrance in a more attractive form than that of newspaper articles or lampoons. Open letters always have a certain piquancy and the epistolary form gave him a fair chance of finding a hearing. The title itself did much to draw attention. It is true that the first part, English Misrule, might look somewhat forbidding in the eyes of the English, who had had enough of "that perpetual lamentation from Ireland", but still, the second part, Irish Misdeeds, proved that the author was not blind to the faults in his own camp. Such an acknowledgment of faults was an uncommon sound in a book which meant to be a vindication of Ireland, as the very first pages intimated. Besides, there was an un-Irish tone in the writer's manner of addressing himself to England: nothing of the 'rhetorical paroxysms' of the "rebels and traitors" of *The Nation*. De Vere had the advantage over the editors of this periodical that he was guided by a better knowledge of the English character. He knew that threats and vociferations produced no effect upon England, any more than the requests and entreaties of the many petitions that reached Parliament. He attributed the failure of *The Nation* to the wrong *tone*. England had two weaknesses: its pride and its love of money. Through his whole book — but especially in the first letter — De Vere demonstrated how England could be hit there.

The first letter is written in that subtly ironical style which suggests the author using it with a smile playing round his lips. Sometimes the mocking tone grows a little more biting and then the smile dissolves into a frown. Seldom, however, does the smile pass into

a sardonic grin of bitter sarcasm. It was in avoiding this extreme that De Vere communicated a particular force to this letter. He never gave way to passion or bitterness. He always kept his temper, a quality which bespoke the English blood in his veins. His imputations were not directed to the whole English nation; he distinguished two Englands: one, "noble, wise, and strong", and the other, "that more sordid England with which it is strangely bound up". For the first England he had nothing but praise, for the second, however, only contempt. It was this England which out of greediness "generally kept vigil for Ireland, while for the rest of the world it generally slept".

The Labour-Rate Act, which authorized the execution of public works during the famine, was the starting-point for the first letter. The Labour-Rate Act (1846), like the Poor Law (1845), was a complete failure owing to the short-sightedness, the apathy, and the tardiness of the government. England laid this failure at the door of the Relief Committees, but De Vere held them least of all responsible for it. They had to discharge their function under too high a pressure: "They deliberated in the midst of hungry crowds, who filled the courthouse, and clustered on each other at darkened windows and doors, watching every movement of the pen, and guessing whether it gave or withheld" (p. 10). The relief committees could achieve nothing, so long as no regulation from the government was forthcoming; and the government did not want to draw up a fixed plan of organization, knowing very well that any arrangement would cost money. It preferred to throw at times a few millions into "the bottomless pit of Irish destitution". When 'bad England' saw that all this was of no avail and that in the end it would have to loosen its purse-strings all the same, it grew angry. "This anger has been subject to laws, by a careful induction from which we are enabled to calculate its intensity and foretell its amount at any given period. The more you have had to pay for Ireland, the more you have disliked her". In its exasperation 'bad England' cursed everything Irish "in Parliament, in society, and in the press"; tenants, landlords, committees, and the clergy, both Anglican and Catholic, they were all ungrateful. De Vere could partly concur with England in this: "For the private charity received from England, the Irish feel an unqualified, for the charity of the State, a qualified gratitude" (p. 30). The readiness to afford financial support illustrated, in De Vere's opinion, clearly the difference between the two Englands: "Nothing can prove more incon-

testably the separate existence of your England and a better England, than the fact that while thousands, who never gave Ireland a farthing, were lavishing abuse without measure upon her; thousands, including many of the class not rich, were denying themselves habitual comforts to minister to the necessities of men whom perhaps they had never heard spoken of, save with scorn" (p. 27). Such a charity was appreciated by the Irish and any Englishman could convince himself of this: "If you had sat in the chill and gloom of an Irish hovel, which had never seemed gloomy or cold to its occupants till the last potato was gone, perhaps you might have heard, as I have often done, a touching, though low-toned tribute of gratitude bestowed on those friends, unknown and invisible as the ministering angels of God, but whose presence in the spirit was ardently realised by the affections of the sufferers, and who received from them neither praise nor thanks unaccompanied by a benediction". But how could an Englishman ever hear such expressions of thanks, unless he determined "to leave the market-place and go to the hovel?" Hardly one of the English Members of Parliament had ever shown his interest in Ireland by taking the trouble of acquainting himself with the state of affairs in 'John Bull's Other Island'. These gentlemen confined themselves to reading newspaper-articles and reports on Ireland and deemed this more than sufficient to form an unfavourable opinion about the inhabitants. Nor did they except the clergy. But De Vere warmly stood up for the clergy of both Churches, and not the least for the Catholic priests, whom he considered "the chief barrier which at present exists between us and anarchy" (p. 43). How sharp was the contrast between the attitude of some dignitaries in the Anglican Church in England and the readiness to help among the clergy in Ireland! De Vere gave a few illustrations of the manner in which the former practised the virtue of charity.

English Misrule in the first letter was followed by *Irish Misdeeds* in the second. Under this head De Vere summed up the faults of the Irish and the charges brought against them by the English. Striking off pure fabrications he reduced the list to some seven accusations which he was disposed to notice because they contained at least "some particle of truth". As for the accusations of destitution and lawlessness he admitted that they were well founded and entirely true. It was his intention to show in the second letter that this destitution and lawlessness were caused by the *English Misrule* through six consecutive centuries, and that the *Irish Misdeeds* were a natural result

of this mismanagement.

The inquiry into the causes of the lawlessness and destitution of the Irish amounted to a historical survey of the English measures, from Henry II onwards, which had reduced Ireland to its miserable state. The vigorous rule of Edward III, Henry VIII, Elizabeth, Cromwell, and William III each time brought England a step nearer to the first place among the nations and under their reign useful laws made England more and more prosperous. But what did they do for Ireland? These same sovereigns, so beneficial for England, were for Ireland the most pernicious. Under Henry VIII English laws were for the first time rigidly enforced in Ireland, but they had another character than those given to England. Instead of prosperity they brought something quite different: destruction, robbery, extermination, and slavery. These laws did not make it possible that Ireland should produce a Chaucer, a Spenser, a Shakespeare, or a Milton. Under Cromwell Ireland seemed to have reached its lowest depth. "The Puritans no doubt lamented, like Titus, that the exterminating sword was committed to their hands; no doubt they wept sore and wrestled with the Lord; but they carried the work bravely through, and entered into possession of the chosen land" (p. 73). The intervals between these reigns were for England periods of construction and development, but for Ireland they meant demolition and utter ruin. No Irishman could have respect for laws which were only harmful; they made him but long for the liberty he enjoyed in the first centuries. "The Englishman reveres the law because his liberty has been its creature, and his prosperity its ward. The Irish peasant has had a liberty too: but for centuries it was the liberty of moonlight mountains and tufted bogs, that bewildered his pursuers. He enjoyed it but he gave no thanks to the law" (p. 52). Insurrections were the result of this and the penal laws were not long in coming. De Vere gave a compendium of them, in which measures that might be thought dead and forgotten were recalled to memory in all their severity. He especially reminded 'bad England' of one of the most infamous deeds, namely, that measure which aimed at dislocating Catholic family life by tempting children to wage war upon their parents: "The eldest son, on conforming to Protestantism, was entitled to the paternal estate, his father retaining only a life interest in it; the other children, on the same conditions, and at any age, could extort from their father a separate and independent maintenance" (p. 83). As the moment was drawing nearer and nearer for England to deem a union expe-

dient, these penal laws were abrogated, not generously all of them together, but gradually. England could not consent to "an inevitable amputation except at the rate of two or three inches at a time". The Union itself did not come up to the expectations of its Irish advocates: "It was carried incompletely and it was carried by corruption". Catholic emancipation was conceded with a grudge and in the ministration of relief during the famine England's animosity made itself felt again. De Vere concluded that after such a treatment of Ireland the English had no reason to complain of the *Irish Misdeeds* and faults of a lighter kind. "You will not now ask me so pertinaciously why we are poor. It is because you impoverished us, confiscating property over and over again, incapacitating the great mass of the people from acquiring or bequeathing it, proscribing industry, and fomenting mutual animosity and common insecurity. You will not ask me why the people are reproached for sloth; — it is because there was no object for their energy; why they procrastinate — it is because there is no difference between to-day and to-morrow when each is a blank; why they bully you — it is because you bullied them, and failed to make them just concessions except on compulsion; why they are deficient in truth — it is because truth is the language of freedom; why they are lawless — its is because for three centuries they knew nothing of your laws, and for three centuries they knew them too well; why they are reproached with levity — it is because they are not ennobled by the graver happiness that entails responsibility; why they do not love the memory of their masters — it is because they could not love it without hating all they are bound to love" (p. 102).

With his survey of *Irish Misdeeds* De Vere might have concluded his book. He would not, however, adopt the attitude of a man who can only pass criticism on existing abuses. He had diagnosed the ills; he now also wanted to propose the remedies. Besides, the subjects discussed in the third letter stimulated him perhaps more to the writing of his book than his indignation at the servile treatment of Ireland. He could even bring himself to forget the past, if England would give up its unfriendly policy at once. It should begin with maintaining peace and creating order in the chaotic confusion which it had produced itself. It could further the interests of peace by a more judicious system of punishment. This is an un-Irish sound indeed from a man like De Vere! To forget the past and to ask for a better application of criminal laws was more than any other Irishman would

ever subscribe to. A few years later John Mitchel was to call this rank treason in *The last Conquest of Ireland (Perhaps)* [8], a work written in the bitterest tone imaginable, in which England was accused of having wilfully brought about the famine in order to crush Ireland. For De Vere, however, who cherished the Unionist idea, a conciliating attitude was a matter of course. On this idea he based the solution of all the Irish problems. It also explained his conviction that at that moment Emigration was the panacea for the poor Irish peasants. *Tenant-Right* and *Repeal,* which he called "wild schemes", could not avert the necessity to emigrate so long as the rich landowners did not give up the land of their own accord. Of the two classes in Ireland one was too many. De Vere attributed the impossibility of both classes living together in peace to over-population, which he thought "the great difficulty of Ireland". With his emigration-theory he interpreted the view of many landlords, who, notwithstanding, meant well by their tenants and who tried to carry out the emigration scheme of one Mr. Godley. Also Aubrey's eldest brother, Sir Vere de Vere, was on their side and he had even made a journey to America on board an emigration-ship in order to see for himself the misery during 'the middle passage'. For the many landlords whom De Vere saw working in the same spirit he deemed it necessary to break a lance, not because he counted himself one of them, but because he wanted to justify the well-meaning among them. Over-population! It was a hard word, it sounded loveless, un-Irish, and we know in what spirit it was received later on by true-born Irishmen. John Mitchel foamed at the mouth at the mere mention of it, John O'Rourke, the writer of *The History of the Great Irish Famine* [9], thought the idea ridiculous, and quoted a note from the Right Rev. Dr. Maginn, Coadjutor Bishop of Derry, to show how Godley's plan was looked upon by other intellectual Irishmen: "In sober earnestness, gentlemen, why send your circular to a Catholic Bishop? Why have the barefaced impudence to ask me to consent to the expatriation of millions of my co-religionists and fellow-countrymen? You, the hereditary oppressors of my race and my religion, — you, who reduced one of the noblest peoples under heaven to live in the most fertile island

[8] John Mitchel, *The Last Conquest of Ireland (Perhaps),* Author's edition, Glasgow, Washbourne Ltd.; New York, 1860.

[9] *The History of the Great Irish Famine of 1847,* with Notices of Earlier Irish Famines, by the Rev. John O'Rourke, P.P.; 2nd ed., 1874; Dublin, M'Glashan & Gill, pp. X-551.

on earth on the worst species of a miserable exotic, which no humane man, having anything better, would constantly give to his swine or his horses; — you, who have made the most beautiful island under the sun a land of skulls, or of ghastly spectres; — you are anxious, I presume, to get a Catholic Bishop to abet your wholesale system of extermination — to head in pontificals the convoy of your exiles, and thereby give the sanction of religion to your atrocious scheme" (p. 494). The alternative to emigration was possession of the cornfields. John Mitchel, too, was aware of this when, in 1848, he proposed to the editor of *The Nation,* Gavan Duffy, to keep the corn in Ireland, if necessary by force. De Vere, as a Unionist, did not take this possibility into consideration. Had he proposed this, his book would have been appreciated by the Irish. He only thought of the impossibility that, in 1847, suddenly and in a peaceful manner, the Irish would become the possessors of the land. He was convinced that the landlords were the rightful owners of the land, which their forefathers, the Anglo-Normans, had conquered by the sword. Therefore his grievances were not connected with the land-question, as was the case with the native Irish. His complaints proceeded from his conviction that England had failed in its duties towards the conquered. If it had helped to develop Ireland's industry and exploit the treasures of its soil, there would have been no question of over-population in 1847. Such aid would have enabled Ireland to support "two million free and contented children beyond the number of outcasts that now rot above the mines of her hidden treasures". Now that England had been remiss in this, emigration, if well conducted and promptly carried through, was the only means to offer immediate help. But also for this measure England's cooperation was indispensable. De Vere explained what profits England would gain if Irishmen with English money could colonize a country like New Brunswick, for instance, and he already fancied John Bull "sitting for hours far back in his chair, with his hands half in his pockets and half out, deliberating whether he would give or not, and how much". And what advantages would not accrue to Ireland itself from a little goodwill on the part of England! But in order to make a development of Ireland's resources really profitable, England should set the impoverished country on its feet again by introducing agricultural education, by establishing "schools for the children of the higher classes", where they would be "thoroughly instructed in the classics and in the language and grammar of their country"; by undertaking useful public works, such as

railways, piers, harbours, and the like. Also the workhouses should be increased, for in 1847 they could accommodate "only" 100.000 persons. The anomaly of Protestant Ascendency ought to disappear; De Vere was an Anglican, but he called it an absurdity that Catholics were forced to contribute to the preservation of the Protestant Church in Ireland, whose aim was "not to diffuse Protestantism through the land, but simply to subvert the Roman Catholic Church". The abolition of Protestant Ascendency would promote the interests of peace exceedingly. If England did not want to cooperate in the improvement of Irish conditions, it might happen that the Irish farmers, who now yearly crossed to England by hundreds in order to earn there a little money, would invade England by thousands, which would increase the unemployment among the English labourers. De Vere gave a humorous sketch of the possibilities opened up by such an 'Irish Invasion', but there was an undertone of seriousness in the picture which made the danger of such an invasion anything but imaginary. Already in 1839 Thomas Carlyle had complained of the large English towns being flooded with multitudes of haggard-looking Irishmen: "The wild Milesian features, looking false ingenuity, restlessness, unreason, misery, mockery, salute you on all highways and byways". Carlyle regarded the Irish as "the sorest evil this country (i.e. England) has to strive with", because they offered their services at such low wages that "the uncivilized Irishman, not by his strength but by the opposite of strength, drives out the Saxon native, takes possession in his room" (*Chartism*, Ch. IV).

In the fourth letter De Vere protested against the humiliating manner in which 'bad England' represented the Irish in word and in picture. The press, headed by *The Times* and *Punch*, missed no opportunity of ridiculing the Nationalist leaders and horrifying the English readers. Between the English dailies and weeklies individually there might be differences of opinion on purely English matters, but in their mockery at the 'sister-island' they were at one, also the *Morning Chronicle*, a ministerial organ, took part in it, and even the dignified *Spectator* did not keep aloof. In the literary world the Irish were as little respected: Thackeray was a contributor to *Punch*, Macaulay renounced his Celtic origin, Walter Savage Landor branded them as "that hyaena race whose growl and smiles alternate and which neither blows nor food, nor stern nor gentle brow domesticate"; and Thomas Carlyle, perhaps the most influential of them all, gave a picture of Irish civilisation in which the Irishman is abased to a

barbarian, or even lower, to an animal, "a starved rat that crosses the path of an elephant". De Vere gave warning against spreading such degrading fables and pointed out to the English that the working-classes in their own country did not live under better circumstances. The scandal existing in certain mining and manufacturing districts proved this. "Amongst us women have never toiled in the attitude of beasts, amid slimy caverns and surrounded by a savage race, naked, blasphemous, and brutal. In this country, children of twelve years old are not to be found who do not know the name of their country or their sovereign" (p. 197). The Irish poor were, De Vere held, less a disgrace to Ireland than the English poor were to England: "If Irish pauperism be a lamentable spectacle to the eye, English pauperism is more awful far to the mind. That men should hunger amid blighted wastes is intelligible enough; that they should be lawless is its obvious consequence: but that a vast and growing pauperism should exist in the heart of infinite wealth, is an evil not transitory or superficial, but indicative of some disease preying upon the vitals of the land". The London shopkeepers, with their "bated breath, their whispering humbleness, and their practised smile", outdid in servility the Irish farmers, who had a natural respect for their superiors. De Vere confined himself to only a short sketch of the abuses and of the defects in the English character: before 1848 the social conditions in England had already been more than once subjected to sharp criticism. But however humanitarian the principles of *Punch* and Carlyle, they made an exception for Ireland: outside England they were, like the others, children of John Bull. Aubrey illustrated this double-faced attitude.

De Vere did not press the attack to the end of his book. Before releasing John Bull he drew a picture of what awaited England if it continued to treat Ireland as a conquered province. Raillery now passed into well-meant admonition, to which his love for England gave warmth. But this love was even more strongly expressed in the beautiful prospect he delineated of a prosperous England, if it were to unite itself closely with the sister-island. A fragment from this vision of a prosperous England may serve as an illustration of his metaphorical, somewhat rhetorical, but glowing style: "Should the better of those two destinies which I have portrayed, be reserved for England, it will be said of her by the future historian, that at a period then long past she had been tried and not found wanting. It will be said that, after the termination of her most arduous war, when she

was flushed by a great military triumph, and flown with the insolence of a long and peaceful prosperity, the sins of her youth were allowed suddenly to overtake her, and she was summoned in a moment to confront and deal finally with that people, at whom, from the beginning to that hour, she had but glanced askance. It will be said that she was equal to the emergency and to herself; and that, putting from her, as another's madness, the whole burden of the past and the cloud of self-willed delusion, she had seized the moment and consummated the triumph. With nations, as with men, the hour of temptation and trial is the hour of rapid advance. Men do not grow either physically or morally by equable progress, but shoot forward at particular periods, especially after disease and suffering; and nations which sometimes sleep for centuries, at other times make in a few years the progress of a century, the blossom unfolding in an hour when the seasonable preparation has previously been made in secret" (pp. 263-264).

The publication of *English Misrule and Irish Misdeeds* added to the political literature of the famine-years (and the years immediately preceding) a work which, if not unique in its conception and execution, differed materially from the pamphlets and treatises which till then had appeared from the English as well as from the Irish side. For the defence of Ireland it did not seek to counter the scorn, the sarcasm, and the self-consciousness of the English writers with the impetuosity, the fierceness, and the bitterness of the nationalist pamphleteers; it did not aim at intimidating the oppressors of Ireland by threatening revenge, nor did it impress upon the people that every drop of blood shed for the Irish cause brought liberty a step nearer; it urged indeed to fight on, but not with the weapons of hatred and blindness. It contended with the weapons of reconciliation, of peace, and of brotherly love; it preached forgiveness and fraternity. One of the qualities by which *English Misrule and Irish Misdeeds* was distinguished from the writings of the contending parties was that it did justice to those who deserved praise, irrespective of their nationality. De Vere was a just though short-sighted man and he had the courage to express his feelings of sympathy for 'better England' and for the Irish landlords, the class which was violently assailed by both parties. He regarded truthfulness as one of the chief factors for a reconciliation between England and Ireland, and in his work he tried to serve truth to the best of his power. From the political writings of that time this virtue seemed to be completely banished. While reading the passage in which De Vere draws a comparison between the truthfulness of

the English and the Irish our thoughts involuntarily turn to the English writer, Thomas Carlyle, "the human paradox of the period", as Henry Taylor called him[10]; and we cannot shake off the feeling that De Vere, when writing about the harmony between 'Verbal Truth' and 'Moral Truth', had his eye particularly upon Carlyle's theory and practice.

Not only by its tendency does *English Misrule and Irish Misdeeds* distinguish itself from the political writings of those days; it also differs from the great mass of tracts and pamphlets in possessing some qualities which stamp it as a work of art. De Vere's book is the fruit of a limited but thorough historical investigation and serious reflection, to which the numberless facts, statistics, data, and quotations bear testimony. The manner in which this chaotic mass is shaped into an orderly whole deserves admiration; it not only shows how completely the writer had mastered his subject, but also how conscientiously the letters were composed. They were not begun haphazard, but each formed part of a well-defined plan. Also the tone was well calculated: the irony, as the most effective weapon in the attack, alternating with the serious tone of persuasion. But it is especially the style which imparts to the book a distinctive character. The dignity of De Vere's language reminds us of Edmund Burke. De Vere was an ardent admirer of this master of eloquence and it seemed as if, together with the principles, he had inherited from his work the mastery of verbal expression. It is true that he seldom rose to the height of Burke's sublime rhetoric; moments of uncontrollable enthusiasm he never had; but he followed his master faithfully in those regions of accurate and flowery expression which are frequented by the literary man rather than by the politician. He seldom dropped below this. His style had that quality of natural ease and balance which marked his whole aristocratic personality, his character, his ideas, his manners, and his writings. Dignity and stateliness had put their seal on them. Even in his more playful moods he never forgot that he was an aristocrat: his irony was tuned to that subtle tone which is not offensive. Among his contemporaries there were some, as e.g. Lord John Manners, Duke of Rutland, who put *English Misrule and Irish Misdeeds* on a level with Burke's work as regards excellence of style. Edward Wakefield (d. 1862), who had written a statistical history of Ireland, went even further and declared it to be "the best book

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[10]) Henry Taylor, *Autobiography*, vol. 1; p. 352.

ever written on Ireland"[11]). Enthusiastic praise of contemporaries, however, should always be accepted with some reserve: Burke was the master, De Vere was and remained the disciple.

On its appearance the book attracted "considerable attention", says Wilfrid Ward in his *Memoir* (p. 131), and "the rain of letters" to the writer testified to the interest which it had awakened in both countries. Even fierce opponents, like Carlyle and Sir James Stephen, a retired civil servant but a critic of weight, admitted that the book had its merits. In the press, too, it did not pass unnoticed. *The Rambler* welcomed the book heartily in its number of February 5, 1848, and concluded a second article, a week later, by recommending it warmly to the English public.

However, De Vere's book produced no practical effect. It succeeded in converting some of the most prejudiced Englishmen to milder feelings towards Ireland, but that was all, and the assumption that Carlyle's journey to Ireland in 1849, or the reform of the Executive at Dublin in 1852, or the ridiculous increase in the number of workhouses in 1849, might be attributable to De Vere's book, is founded only on the fact that all these events took place shortly after its appearance and after the famine. Some of his acquaintances took exception to the tone of the book; the irony, they thought, wounded England's pride; others, again, protested against what they called a one-sided representation of England's guilt. But the main reason why the book was unacceptable to the majority of his contemporaries was that it was practically a soliloquy.

De Vere endeavoured to win both parties over to his idea of a real Union, and he forgot that the Union was born between two attempts to regain independence. It had never been popular; it had even been abhorred, in England as well as in Ireland. The government refused to let go of Ireland and therefore created the Union with the support of the landlords in Ireland. That the whole of the Catholic clergy were advocates of the Union, as John Mitchel asserted, is not true. The Unionists were not large in number and did not count in the great mass. From the outset it was a hopeless enterprise for De Vere to try to reconcile Ireland with England and put an end to the struggle which had been raging for six centuries; but he had the courage to declare his convictions, although he knew that he would prejudice both parties against him: "Such sentiments as I have expressed must excite the hostility of a large section of the British public; and, coupled

[11]) W. Ward, *Memoir*, p. 138.

with the admission I have made (i.e. of some shortcomings in the Irish character), will win me no popularity in Ireland" (p. 262). De Vere tried to put himself above the parties. He wrote with common sense and out of love for both countries, a love inspired by his English descent and his Irish education. The solution he proposed was reasoned out and rested on theory; but it was of no use in practice. For the native Irishman there was only one solution of the problems: absolute independence. Burke would never have overlooked this demand and he would not have omitted in his argument to appeal to the eternal laws of justice. De Vere did not grasp the situation with sufficient breadth: like most of his English contemporaries [12]), he regarded the Great Irish Famine as an isolated event, as "a mere relief from pressure" [13]), or at most as an unprofitable wrangle between two parties. He did not see it as an endless struggle between two different peoples. For his book this meant oblivion.

From 1866 to 1868 De Vere published five pamphlets on the Church in Ireland: *The Church Settlement of Ireland, or, Hibernia Pacanda; The Church Establishment in Ireland; Ireland's Church Property; Pleas for Secularisation;* and *Reply to certain strictures by Miles O'Reilly,* which are all sound enough, being based on the principles of logic and justice; but, when writing, in later years, on the political relations between England and Ireland, he was still a Unionist and he proved, just as he had done in *English Misrule and Irish Misdeeds,* that his insight into the feelings of both countries was deficient. He strenuously opposed Home Rule for Ireland in a pamphlet entitled *A Policy for Ireland* (1887), and he was still urging in it the necessity of taking strong measures against the Irish agitators. From the same standpoint he had discussed the question of *Ireland and Proportionate Representation* in a pamphlet published in 1885. All these publications have only a historical value now, but one of them, *Church Property and Secularisation,* as De Vere entitled it when re-publishing it in 1889, has preserved an actual value also, for, although it has now lost its meaning for Ireland, it is to some extent still applicable to England; and it may acquire an additional value in the near future with respect to other countries.

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[12]) Hilaire Belloc, *A Shorter History of England;* London, George Harrap & Co, 1934; p. 575.

[13]) ibid. p. 575.

d. Literary Essays

It needs only a single glance at their headings to show us how De Vere's *Literary Essays* originated. The names of Wordsworth, Spenser, Landor, Keats, Shelley, Taylor, Patmore, Ferguson, and Trench are familiar to us from the character of his poetry, and to see the same gallery of men passing in review in these essays is to recall to our minds the three principal elements of his literary nature. De Vere's love of poetry was accountable for his selection of poets only, his patriotism directed him to both Irishmen and Englishmen, and his religious sense made him include such men as Trench and Patmore. But these essays are of a peculiar kind. They are not really criticisms of these poets, or if they are, the critical element is only of a subordinate character in most of them. They are first of all expositions of De Vere's poetic ideals and of his conception of the poetic function. In them he practised the same method as he had applied in the religious essays, taking the work of these authors as a starting-point and proceeding from a general discussion of the poems to the literary subjects that seemed to him all important in his conception of the poetic art. In each of these poets he saw embodied one or more of his sympathies, and in defending their poetry he defended his own. From this manner of working two characteristics of the essays become apparent, first, that they were written with the aim to vindicate the principles which had guided him as a poet, and secondly, that in their expository and analytic character they show us the counterpart of the aspect which is represented by his poems.

De Vere had chosen Landor, Keats, and Shelley mainly for the purpose of putting forward his views with respect to Classicism and Romanticism. The relation between these two tendencies in poetry was a favourite topic among the Victorian essayists, who felt that the reform of the first decades had shaken the time-honoured doctrines of the poetic function to their foundations and that the very nature of the art had been turned into a problem by it. The romantic outburst of 1800 was still too young for men like Macaulay and Carlyle to probe its effect and true character, so that they could hardly be expected to have expressed any definite opinion on it; but both of them had thrown out some useful hints on the character of poetry in general, Macaulay in his essays on *Milton* (1825) and *Macchiavelli* (1827), Carlyle in *Heroes and Hero-Worship* (1841); and many of their ideas served as a basis for the younger ones to build on. For

instance, it was a sentence in Macaulay's essay on Milton from which De Vere in *Some Remarks on Literature in its Social Aspects* — an essay composed out of the lectures he had delivered at the Catholic University at Dublin in 1856 — developed his theory about the gradual decline of poetry from an art to a profession, and from a profession to a trade. In the 'twenties Landor had given some thought to the contrast between Classicism and Romanticism in *Imaginary Conversations* (1824-1829), especially in the chapter *Southey and Porson*, and also others, like Henry Lytton Bulwer, had noticed it. But Ruskin was one of the first to attempt, in his monumental work *Modern Painters* (3rd vol. 1856), an analysis of the elements of Classicism (and incidentally of Mediaevalism and of Romanticism), although he treated his subject from the standpoint of the artist in general rather than from that of the poet. In the second half of the century, however, the discussion of the problem widened when Matthew Arnold in his essays championed the cause of Classicism and preached its principles as the only true basis on which to found the education of mankind. He found an opponent in John C. Shairp, who claimed as much right for the principles of Romanticism, of which he gave an exposition. Shortly after, Bagehot's *Literary Studies* were published (1879-1881). He assumed three directions, discussed their several characteristics, and ranked them in order of importance as Pure Art, Ornate Art, and Grotesque Art. He brought the subject up to De Vere's time of writing.

However, De Vere had been thinking on the difference between Classicism and Romanticism long before. On his journey to the Levant in 1840 he had been struck by the contrast between the aspect of the South and of the North, and in *Picturesque Sketches* he had already written the following remarkable passage: "Nothing can be more different in character than the landscape of the north and of the south. The character of the former is grave, subdued, and tender, abounding in passages of pathos and mystery, though glorified, not seldom, by a golden haze. That of the south, on the other hand, is at once majestic and joyous, ample in its dimensions, but not abounding in a complex variety of detail; clearly defined, severe in structure, well brought out into the light; but at the same time unspiritual in its scope, appealing less to the heart than to the fancy, expressing everything to the understanding, and, consequently, reserving little for a slowly apprehensive imagination. An analogous distinction may perhaps be traced in the character of the northern and southern races.

In every country, indeed, there exists a certain analogy between the outward shapes of nature, and the mind it has nursed and helped to form". This impression of difference in 'mood' between the southern and northern landscapes lay at the root of the theory developed in *Landor's Poetry* and in *Keats and Shelley*, in which two essays De Vere extended the analogy to the poetry of the south and of the north.

Landor had been selected because, in De Vere's opinion, by Landor's work the essential qualities of Ancient poetry were best illustrated. His *Hellenics* were marked by "the clear outline, the definite grace, and sunny expansiveness of Greek poetry, and not less its aversion to the mysterious and the spiritual. Above all, they were classical in their peculiar mode of dealing with outward nature". These qualities of classical art had already been pointed out by earlier critics; but not one of them had as yet tried to account for the circumstance that the enchanting landscape of the south contributed so little to poetry in ancient times. This De Vere attempted to do in his essay on *Landor's Poetry*. His theory was that from nature no inspiring force went out except to a reflective mind, and reflectiveness, he held, was exactly the form of mental activity to which the character of the southern landscape had indisposed the Greeks. In its "clearness of outline" and "gemlike purity" the Greek imagination found comparatively little which required to be idealised, and as its beauty appealed to the senses only, no contemplation was needed to enhance the enjoyment of it. Mountain scenery was positively distasteful to Greek poets, whose imagination loved the orderly and the symmetrical, but disliked the unlimited and the terrible. In the hugeness of their mountains they could not fail to see an element of infinitude, and "in such scenery the Greek imagination, possessing no key to its harmonies, saw nothing to delight it, but much to disquiet, to discompose, and to abash". As for the plains the Greeks appreciated their charming beauty, but they enjoyed it in a sensuous manner only, with a childlike admiration, not knowing how to combine object with object. Their imagination was too impulsive for that. The Greek poet "dwelt long on the object close by; then looking on it as on a marvel that needed interpretation, he crowned it with a legend".

It is not difficult to divine what thought was at the back of De Vere's mind when he tried to explain the causes of the aversion of the Greeks to natural scenery. Expressions such as 'the infinite', 'the unlimited', 'the mysterious', are significant enough in this essay to

show that as the deeper cause of this aversion he regarded their ignorance of the Christian lore. The Christian Faith was in his view "the key to Nature's harmonies". He implied as much when he gave it as his opinion that "the Arts of the middle ages soared above Paganism", and that "Christianity introduced into man's imagination a spirit antagonistic to Pagan conceptions". To De Vere Greek mythology was a lifeless fabric, a religion of pantheism, to which polytheistic worship was closely related. As a creed it satisfied all the needs of an Epicurean mind, because in some sense the mythological figures were alike human and divine, and sufficed as symbols for the living powers of Nature. In these human forms the Greeks embodied their worship of visible Nature; but, thus limited, their religion could never raise them to that spiritual awe which pervades the nature-description of the Christian poets.

If the first essay is alone sufficient to show De Vere's boldness and originality in setting forth his ideas on the subject of poetry, the second contains a still stronger proof of this. It deals with the knotty problem of Classicism and Romanticism in the poetry of the north and is an attempt to explain the relation between these two tendencies on principles quite different from those adopted by contemporary critics. On the twofold character of modern poetry he had much to say; there are no less than three titles over the essay: *The two chief Schools of English Poetry, Poetic Versatility, Shelley and Keats,* which show that his thoughts had ranged over three different subjects, each a unit in itself, and yet in his mind combined into a whole.

It is an essential point in this essay on Classicism and Romanticism that neither of these names is used. Apparently De Vere could have peace with the words 'classic' and 'classical', which frequently occur in both essays, but he systematically avoided the usage of such terms as 'Romantic', 'Romanticism', and even 'Classicism'. Possibly Bagehot's disapproval of them had set him thinking and his arguments may have convinced him that the names were wrong. But he thought Bagehot's substitutes equally inadequate to designate the two directions as he saw them. He had been struck by the fact that in the north there had always been many poets who in their work showed a preference for the beauty of the south, and that, on the other hand, as many had clung to their own country. Here, obviously, were two different schools. But were they really distinguished by the terms 'Classical' and 'Romantic', and if so, which was Classical, which Romantic, and why? And how was it that among the Greeks no poet had

ever turned to the north for his inspiration? To these questions the essayists of his time gave no answer, and they had never tried to explain these phenomena. De Vere thought that the solution of the problem lay in the difference of landscape.

The connection between this part of the essay (*Poetic Versatility*) and the essay on Landor is De Vere's theory that the poets of the north had been disposed by the character of their surroundings to greater reflectiveness than the Greeks. This quality emphasized in them the two tendencies which are found in every human mind, a tendency both for the real and for the ideal. Especially the latter was characteristic in the imagination of northern poets; they all turned away at times from the actual world about them to seek in their imagination the pleasures of a more enchanting world, an ideal region, which seemed to them a world of perfection. For every poet of the north the south had been such a region; its beauty, its remoteness, its fame, and its arts favoured the illusion. According as the balance preponderated in one direction or the other they could, De Vere thought, be classed as poets of the *National* school, or as poets of the *Idealistic* school, the first being distinguished by "its reality, its home-bred sympathies, and its affinities with national history, character, and manners", the second by "its plastic power and its function of embodying the abstractedly great and the ideally beautiful". These two schools, De Vere held, had existed from the beginning of literature and had flourished or declined in conjunction. The Greeks, too, had known them, but their ideal world had been little more than "the company of their Gods".

In the second part of this essay, *The two chief Schools of English Poetry*, De Vere gave a survey of English literature to illustrate at the hand of its development that the two schools had always coexisted and that in each poet of importance the two tendencies are observable. He began with a comparison between the two greatest, Shakespeare and Milton, in whom the tendencies were mixed, but in the case of Shakespeare the national element predominated, and in Milton the idealistic. To Shakespeare's preference for national themes De Vere attributed his greater popularity. Then, re-starting with the national Chaucer and the idealistic Spenser, De Vere made a rapid sweep over the period of the Elizabethans, of the Restoration, of the Cavalier-poets, of the Augustan age, and of 'Pre-Romanticism', until he had come to the great revival itself. From this active period

he selected Shelley and Keats for closer analysis as the best representatives of the Idealistic school.

This third part of the essay is perhaps less original in its propositions than the other two. De Vere's cursory discussion of the best-known poems of the two authors does not throw much new light on their places in literature. His contention that Shelley, the idealist, was classical in temperament, that his brother-poet, Keats, was far more classical than he in sensuousness, that Keats had more repose in him, and that Beauty was the very essence of Keats's poetry, whereas in Shelley's it was only an adornment, does not greatly modify the impression which other contemporary critics convey to us, e.g. Swinburne on Keats (in *Miscellanies*, 1886), Colvin in the *English Men of Letters* series (Keats, 1887), and R. H. Hutton in his essay on Shelley (*Literary Essays*, 3rd ed. 1888), all of which criticisms had appeared before De Vere's essay on Keats and Shelley was published.

De Vere's terms *National* and *Idealistic*, although not direct opposites, preclude any danger of confusion or misapprehension. Their meaning is quite definite and they have the advantage of pointing directly to all the features that are generally recognised as essential in either of the 'schools'. Indeed, reality, description of the actual world, interpretation of the spirit of the age, and all that is contained in the word 'national', are very much the ideas that critics have tried to express by the term 'classical', just as unreality, wonder, dreaminess, flight to other regions, and any other characteristic of the idealist, have gradually come to be read into the term 'romantic'. But the epithets 'National' and 'Idealistic' do not fully correspond with the terms 'classical' and 'romantic'. When speaking of English poets De Vere used the term 'classical' as synonymous with "imitative of pre-Christian, particularly Greek art", and in this sense classical poets, like Milton and Landor, were in his view as idealistic as Keats or Shelley. He also distinguished between the terms 'national' and 'classical' when ranking Dante as one of the great national poets of the world, with Homer and Shakespeare, and calling him at the same time 'classical' in a historical sense, by which he meant that Dante's art stood in the same relation to the Christian era as Greek art to pre-Christian times. Nor could the epithet 'romantic' be wholly substituted for De Vere's term 'idealistic', as is proved by his classification of Robert Burns as "emphatically the most national of poets", Burns, who is generally regarded as the great precursor of the English romantic revival. Instances like Milton and Landor, or like Wordsworth and Coleridge,

whom he called 'national', though to a different degree, show that De Vere's system of division more than once crosses the conventional classification and that the two systems are hardly comparable.

In 1882 De Vere was invited by the Rev. Dr. Alex. B. Grosart to contribute an article to the ambitious work which the latter had planned: *The Complete Works in Verse and Prose of Edmund Spenser.* The 10 parts of this "monumental edition", as Dr. Grosart himself called it, appeared between 1882 and 1884; 150 copies of it were printed, which were meant "for private circulation only". To assist him in this enterprise the learned biographer had engaged the services of "a select Band of Essayists and Annotators", of whom Professor Dowden was one. Dr. Grosart was convinced that he could entrust part of the critical work to such men as Dowden and De Vere: the former's reputation as a critic of Elizabethan literature was already established and particularly in the essay *Heroines of Spenser,* contributed to the *Cornhill Magazine,* in June, 1879, he had shown his profound admiration for "the poet of poets"; while the latter had done no less in his article *Spenser as a Philosophic Poet,* written for the *Edinburgh Review,* shortly after.

De Vere accepted Grosart's invitation; he loved to write on Spenser. After Wordsworth, Spenser was the poet whom he admired most and to whose conception of the poetic function he felt his own to be nearest related. In one respect Spenser's poetry was even dearer to him than Wordsworth's, for it reminded him of the Middle Ages, and this was the period above all others in history and literature on which his thoughts liked to dwell: the period of the Church's greatest glory. He considered Spenser by preference as the poet of "the Ages of Faith". In viewing him thus he differed from Richard W. Church, who had published a biography of Spenser in 1879 and had added to it a critical analysis of the *Faery Queen.* The Dean of St. Paul's had given a clear exposition of the social conditions during the reign of Elizabeth and for its fine style the monograph is to be reckoned among the best in John Morley's *English Men of Letters* series; but Church's interpretation of Spenser had not been fully literary. He had judged his work from the standpoint of the biographer, who before all other things places the poet in his time and who tries to find back in his poetry he character of his age, the spirit of it. De Vere's essay on *Characteristics of Spenser's Poetry* was purely literary and resembled in this respect Dowden's contribution to Grosart's edition, *Spenser, the Poet and Teacher.* All the three critics observed in the *Faery Queen*

a mixture of Mediaeval and Elizabethan elements, a twofold character, which the allegory had acquired, because Spenser, when writing his poem, had apparently tried to combine two different periods. But, whereas it appeared to Church as a mistake that Spenser had put his contemporaries, the courtiers and state-officials, upon the stage with mediaeval manners and customs, and had sometimes even invested them with qualities from the realm of idealism, it was regretted by De Vere that the poet had obscured his picture of idealised knights by impersonating some of his contemporaries in those figures. The starting-points of Church and De Vere were diametrically opposed. Viewed as a product of the Renascence, and compared with the more homogeneous work of Shakespeare, who shortly after Spenser's death had reached the height of his powers, Church found much in the *Faery Queen* which "at first acquaintance to many of us has been disappointing, artificial, fantastic, tiresome". To Spenser's inconsistent treatment of the figures and their surroundings, to his return to the age of Chaucer, he ascribed the many shortcomings in the *Faery Queen,* which he summarized under the three heads: "A great fault of construction", "its affectation of language", and "the imperfections and inconsistencies of the poet's standard of what is becoming to say and write about".

The purpose of demonstrating a poet's greatness is not served by laying stress on the negative qualities in his work. De Vere disapproved of such a method in the following witty metaphor: "If, in comparing man with man, we measure their heights by their ankles, not their heads, there is little to choose between them". He admitted that there were faults in Spenser's poems, but in comparison with the essential good qualities, they were, in his opinion, only "stains on the surface that need to be stepped over like bad spots on a road". Most of them were attributable to bad influences of his time, which show themselves in the work of every great poet. In Spenser's poetry they revealed themselves in "occasional coarseness", in servile complimentary poems, in attacks upon the Church, and in glorification of political figures. This glorification, an important element in the Elizabethan literature, De Vere numbered among the "anachronisms" in the *Faery Queen,* and he regarded this as the chief factor "that drew Spenser's genius aside from what would have been its natural walk". The *Faery Queen* might have been the counterpart of Dante's *Divina Commedia,* "the human side of a great mediaeval theme" over against or beside "the supernatural side", but Spenser had not preserved the unity in the

poem with the result that "the great romantic poem of the Middle Ages was never written, and the opportunity is lost". The sole favourable influence which the Renascence had exercised on Spenser's poetry was, in De Vere's opinion, that he had acquired through it a knowledge of "classical, especially of mythological lore, such as no medieval writer possessed".

De Vere's essay derives its importance for a large part from the broad basis on which it rests. He viewed the *Faery Queen* as the masterpiece of one of those poets whose creations are the pillars of the world's literature, such as Homer, Virgil, Dante, Tasso, Shakespeare, and Milton; the time in which the poem appeared, as the transition from the Middle Ages to the Renascence. For him Spenser was "the first poet of the new era, yet more emphatically the last poet of the old — at once the morning star of England's later, and the evening star of her earlier literature". With the same breadth of outlook he viewed the characteristic qualities of the *Faery Queen,* which poem he regarded as the treasure-chamber of Spenser's greatest gifts, "thoughtfulness and imagination".

As the principal qualities that marked Spenser's true poetic nature, De Vere mentioned: "a sense of beauty", "descriptive power", and "moral wisdom". These elements had also been noticed by Church and Dowden before him. But De Vere followed only the main lines. Convinced as he was that the qualities of Spenser's poetry "can no more be separated than the colour of a flower can be separated from its fragrance", he analysed no passage to point out the excellence of Spenser's poetic language; nor did he seek to illustrate it in single lines or words. Melody, he held, was a form of beauty that gratifies only the ear, a concrete form, which he deemed less valuable than the other form of the twofold beauty which Prof. Dowden had observed in the *Faery Queen,* namely, the abstract beauty, which is embodied in the felicitous combination of 'imagination', 'moral wisdom', 'human interest', and 'suggestiveness'. The harmony of these elements was chiefly the subject of De Vere's analysis and he tried to illustrate the spiritual beauty of the *Faery Queen* by numerous quotations from the poem. They are all directed to the explanation of the *Faery Queen* as an expression of Spenser's inner life. The expatiation on the three female figures, Belphoebe, Amoret, and Britomart, is an example of De Vere's explanatory criticism; he did not analyse the figures as three dramatic characters, but tried to explain the connection between the three forms in which Spenser had

represented ideal, spiritual love. Not for the richness of his language, but for the greatness of his poetic soul, which was a unity and "not merely a collection of faculties and parts", did De Vere rank Spenser among "the world's poets of the first class"; and to his sense of beauty he ascribed the power which so often induced later poets to imitate Spenser's poetry: Shakespeare, Dryden, Scott, Wordsworth, Southey, Keats, Shelley, Macaulay. The passages of their direct or indirect borrowings from Spenser stood nearly all of them engraved in his tenacious memory.

However, De Vere did not attribute all the faults of the *Faery Queen* to the bad influences of Spenser's time. To his mind Spenser did not possess the gift to describe battles, as the combat between Una's knight and the dragon illustrates; Spenser was often prolix and repeated himself more than once. But, above all, he lacked the power of construction. The want of a definite plan, "the most serious fault in the *Faery Queen*", De Vere ascribed to Spenser's imitation of Ariosto, and his endeavour "to emulate and perhaps overgo" the latter's romantic story, *Orlando Furioso*. Ariosto's work had left its imprint upon European, especially on English literature; but in De Vere's eyes "the poet of a land in which chivalry never flourished" was an inferior writer as compared with his greater countryman Tasso. He regarded Ariosto as a bad tree, which could produce only bad fruit, also among his faithful imitators, of whom Byron was one; Tasso, on the other hand, he regarded as a good tree. But, whatever Spenser might have learned from Tasso, he was always greatest when he leaned least on others, and then his poetry had, like Tasso's, a soul.

De Vere gave his best thoughts on Spenser in the other essay. Himself a philosophic poet, he was a critic 'par excellence' to write on this subject and the wonder is why Dr. Grosart did not assign to him the article which he entrusted to Dowden. We are immediately struck by the greater warmth with which De Vere praises Spenser's merits as a philosophic poet and by the greater confidence with which he exposes his views. It is true that his paraphrases of some passages from the *Faery Queen* might have been shorter, but in general his talent as an explanatory critic shows itself here at its best. It is no disparagement of Dowden's critical power to say that, as regards positiveness of ideas, De Vere's analysis of Spenser's philosophy and teachership is on a higher level than that of his colleague. In no other critic were sympathy for Spenser's work and keen insight into "his philosophy" more happily combined than in De Vere.

Perhaps the greatest merit of this essay is that the author gave an orderly exposition of the main features of Spenser's "philosophy". The *Faery Queen* is "a labyrinth of underwood not easily pierced", from which Spenser's ideas do not always shoot up like high trees, a poem full of human wisdom, but to "the undiscerning eye" apparently without any system. Spenser had planned to write a sequel to the *Faery Queen,* which was to have illustrated the political virtues. He finished only half of the first romance and no part of the second; but many fragments of the proposed sequel lie scattered over the six books of the *Faery Queen.* It required a great familiarity with the contents of all their cantos to piece these fragments together! But De Vere knew the *Faery Queen.* With what sureness and discernment did he skip from one stanza, canto, or book, to another to dig out from the chaotic mass Spenser's ideas about political and moral virtues, such as humility, self-control, obedience, and duty; or to point out how Spenser in his poetry more than once seemed to see and denounce approaching impostures. Of these De Vere mentioned especially 'universal equality', and "that ethical craze of our later time which claims for women all the civil and political privileges and functions which belong to men". In this latter problem he put Spenser's views over against Milton's "Mahometan ideal of woman", as suggested to De Vere's mind by Milton's line: —

"He for God only: she for God in him." [14])

But it was above all in dealing with Spenser's higher, or moral philosophy that De Vere showed the acuteness of his analytic power. In this part he discussed the relation between "the ordinary, the higher, and the potential life" of man, or the steady progress from the animal life in him through the spiritual to the divine life, which development he illustrated from the two cantos of *Mutability,* and from the *Garden of Adonis* (Book 3, Canto VI). This analysis is a trying one for unphilosophic minds, but it must tell every reader that this subject was the very thing for De Vere. In it he drew a comparison between Spenser's thoughts on humanity in relation with nature and Lucretius' philosophy on the same subject. The Roman poet was admired by many men of letters in the 19th century and the greatness of his work was universally recognised. Tennyson in his youth was one of his most ardent worshippers. De Vere, too, acknowledged the greatness of Lucretius' imagination, descriptive power, impassioned eloquence, and vivid imagery; but so far from defending or accepting his theories in

[14]) *Paradise Lost;* Book IV, l. 299.

any part of them, he mercilessly tore his philosophy to pieces and branded him as a cynical, pessimistic teacher of materialism. To the Lucretian spirit of despair he opposed Spenser's teaching of hope. With the modern Christian poet Nature was no longer suffered "to prey on her own offspring", but she was interpreted as part of the God-created world, reflecting a divine radiance. And he regarded man in the same way: just as animals reflected the lower elements in human nature, so the higher elements in man reflected the divine life for which he was destined. It is evident from the long, eloquent sentences that De Vere wrote this part of the essay with great enthusiasm. It was the voicing in prose of his favourite thoughts on the problem of man's fate and destiny, and in picturing the 'God-sent' Elizabethan philosopher as a forerunner of Wordsworth, he showed how closely his own work as a poet was related to both. A comparison between the thinkers of the old world and the new makes a grand close to the essay.

It seems only a small step from Spenser to Wordsworth, from the philosophic poet of Elizabethan times, to a poet who called himself a teacher of man, and whom De Vere designated as "England's great philosophic poet". Wordsworth and Spenser have much in common with each other and in the two centuries that separate them no other great poet is to be found for whom Spenser was so avowedly a master as for Wordsworth. And yet, the differences between them are more numerous than the similarities, and so completely has De Vere considered Wordsworth by himself that Spenser's name does not occur in these essays. For him Wordsworth stood quite apart, as a figure from whom he could not turn off his eyes, and for whose poetry he cherished an admiration which surpassed any other sympathy. Matthew Arnold declared of himself that "no Wordsworthian has a tenderer affection for this pure and sage master than I", and in order to rouse the reading public in England to the interest in Wordsworth's work which it deserved, he published a selection of his poetry in 1879. But some of Wordsworth's admirers took exception to his statements in the introduction to this edition that "for humour, felicity, passion in Wordsworth we shall look in vain", and that "Wordsworth has no style"; their feelings of reverence for the poetic gifts of the master were hurt and they thought that these assertions were seriously derogatory to the poet's reputation. De Vere was one of these admirers. He could testify to the same love for Wordsworth as Arnold and that love

certainly spoke more strongly from the character of the three essays which he wrote on Wordsworth: *The Genius and Passion of Wordsworth, The Wisdom and Truth of Wordsworth's Poetry,* and *The Personal Character of Wordsworth's Poetry.* Not for a moment did he doubt the sincerity of Arnold's feelings concerning Wordsworth and he could not but see a confirmation of it in his judgment that Wordsworth was England's greatest poet after Shakespeare and Milton, but in his opinion Arnold had gone too far in stating Wordsworth's shortcomings.

The chief aim of the first essay, *The Genius and Passion of Wordsworth,* was to defend Wordsworth against the charge that his poetry lacked 'passion'. Not that De Vere admitted the justness of Arnold's other remarks or passed them by without comment. Style is an important element in poetry and De Vere, himself a student of the art, knew to what considerable extent the personal and essential character of a poet's work is brought out by it. Therefore he did not share Arnold's opinion that Wordsworth had no style and he observed that "the general plainness of that style is a common complaint with those whose taste has been vitiated by the over-flavoured poetry common in recent times; but it was often with the poet a matter of deliberate choice, as is proved by the richness and majesty of his language on suitable occasions, and by the fact that hardly any poetry abounds so largely in memorable lines". He admitted that there was a great difference between the style of Wordsworth and that of Shakespeare or Milton, and that Wordsworth's theory about Poetic Diction partially failed in practice: "In his first efforts Wordsworth was doubtless somewhat too much of a radical reformer as regards the abuses which had long corrupted language. His remarks on that subject seemed to assume that the language of common life which he recommended for poetical purposes, differed little from that of good prose-writings, a statement to which there are many exceptions. He did not succeed in thus substituting the language of common life for poetic diction". Especially in moments when he wrote without any inspiration it seemed as if his poetry did not even reach the level of indifferent poets, like William Cowper. But only for these exceptional cases would De Vere hear of a comparison between his favourite poet and authors of inferior rank, and when he wrote that "it is in reference to his most didactic passages only that one can accept the allegation that Wordsworth has no style", his words were meant as a rehabilitation of Wordsworth rather than as a concession to Arnold.

But De Vere had not done yet with the question of Wordsworth's style: he concluded his second essay with a protest against the misjudgment of that style, and in the first he returned to the subject as many as four times.

However, he thought the accusation that Wordsworth's poetry lacked 'passion' the most serious. It was this element which, in his opinion, made Wordsworth's art a whole, and which connected "the intellectual powers, moral energies, and imaginative sympathies of his whole being". Without 'passion' there was no poetry. Had not Wordsworth, just as Milton, emphasized this element in his definition of poetry? It appeared to De Vere as a corruption of literary taste among his contemporaries that so many of them dared call Wordsworth's poetry "unimpassioned" or "scant in passion", and he considered this the great cause why Wordsworth was not understood.

The word 'passion', as used by literary critics, is perhaps as undefinable as the word 'poetry' itself, with which it is so often associated. De Vere gives his own interpretation. "Passion is not appetite", he declared; "it means profound and intense feeling, addressed, first to all that relates to the human ties, and next to remoter objects, whether above or around us, so far as they can be coloured by human imagination and emotion. Genuine poetic passion, when dealing with human themes, must show the depth and preciousness, nay, it must imply the infinitude, which belong to all the divinely-created bonds of earthly life, and should not exhaust itself, as is now so disproportionately common, upon a single form of love — that form the claims of which the readers of verse require least to be reminded of". From this passage it appears not only that he regarded the function and range of 'passion' as almost unlimited, and with it the number of its forms, but also that he distinguished these forms in higher and lower ones, forms of 'passion' which mark true poetry, the poetic passions, and those which are unworthy of art. The latter he deemed unnatural, deceptive, and without any formative value. Among them he reckoned the various tricks in style and representation, by means of which modern poets often tried to impart "a sensational character" to a certain subject, usually that of sensual love, in the supposition that "the reader's heart, before it can feel, must have nails driven into it". These "clowns of poetry" were themselves insensible to the finer forms of 'passion' and often betrayed their one-sidedness by the unpoetical manner in which they treated other subjects, e.g. "sorrow, of all things the most sacred". Wordsworth never had recourse to

such tricks and in this respect his poetry was without 'passion'. His style was always simple and he never described feelings which he did not actually experience. The 'passion' in his poetry was quite different from that in the work of modern poets. The emotions which he excited in the reader had not an exceptional, but a universal character. This universality proceeded from the working of a special force, which De Vere called "moral passion", after the moral element that predominated in it. Every element in real poetry was for him a form of 'passion', whether it concerned the thinking power, the imagination, the style, or the general spirit of a poem. The "passions of the intellect and of the imagination", together with 'moral passion' he regarded as "the rarest and highest forms". They were characteristic of Wordsworth's poetry and in their unity his genius was chiefly expressed. It was under the conjoint working of these forces that in his descriptions simple actions of man rose to the noblest forms of virtue, that the disappointments and trials of daily life acquired the importance of world-tragedies, and that the poet's sympathy with his fellow-men could communicate to his poetry a warmth and a pathos far more natural and deeper than the emotions artificially excited by other writers. It was also these forces which gave to Wordsworth's poetry such a great diversity of qualities, moods, and sentiment. De Vere illustrated this diversity by noting the characteristic features of some poems: the tenderness in *Ruth,* the tragedy in *The Brothers,* the robustness in *Michael,* the pathos in *The Cumberland Beggar,* the sadness in *Margaret,* the remorse and the terrible in *The Solitary,* to which poem with its picture of suffering in a man De Vere opposed *Margaret,* in which the suffering of a woman is painted. But the best illustration of both strength and pathos was, in his opinion, *The Leech-Gatherer,* or *Resolution and Independence.* In this poem Wordsworth showed the breadth of his creative faculty in picturing the contrast between the characters of a scholar and of a plain man; his warm sympathy with a dutiful human being, in drawing the nobility of soul in the leech-gatherer; and his susceptibility to the impressions of Nature, in rendering her changing moods. This poem was the acme of Wordsworth's "imaginative passion"! Arnold had praised it half-heartedly for its "baldness of style", but in De Vere's eyes it was "the most powerful example of that earlier style characterised by robustness, brooding meditation, and truth at once to nature and to passion".

De Vere also combated the view of some critics that Wordsworth's

poetry was deficient in lyrical warmth, because the poet had suppressed any utterance of feeling with respect to love. He argued that sympathy for man, and patriotism, were also forms of love and even more valuable for poetry than "the personal passion in its interjectional form" of other poets. As for sexual love, De Vere declared that Wordsworth had written love-poems, not many, it is true, perhaps half a dozen, but they were love-poems in the strict sense of the term. *She was a Phantom of Delight, Strange Fits of Passion I have known,* and *She dwelt among the Untrodden Ways,* were examples. However, he admitted that Wordsworth had never been very communicative about his intimate life, and he doubted if the feelings expressed in these poems were founded on reality: "No one was less disposed than Wordsworth to minister to that vulgar curiosity which in these days respects no sanctuary".

In his second essay, *The Wisdom and Truth of Wordsworth's Poetry,* De Vere gave an analysis of the poet's "philosophy". With respect to this element in Wordsworth's poetry Arnold had declared that "his poetry is the reality — his philosophy is the illusion", and certainly no other of his remarks offered De Vere a better opportunity to try and remove a common prejudice against Wordsworth's poetry. It was a prejudice of long standing. Ever since the appearance of the *Lyrical Ballads* there had been critics who had failed to appreciate the philosophic character of Wordsworth's poetry. Especially during the first decades of the 19th century many had given evidence of their shortsightedness by classifying him exclusively as a "pastoral", "idyllic", or "descriptive" poet, and by ridiculing his verse for the very element of philosophy in it. The typical representative of this group of "classicists" had been Francis Jeffrey, a highly talented journalist, who in his criticisms of Elizabethan poets and of contemporaries, such as Scott, Byron, and Keats, had applied nearly exclusively the eighteenth century standard. But the Whig-lawyer was not a philosopher and the significance of Wordsworth's poetry as an expression of new poetic conceptions escaped him altogether. Consequently his criticisms were generally very unfavourable. At first he attributed the revolutionary ideas which he thought he could detect in the work of the 'Laker', to influences of Rousseau and German thinkers, but gradually he came to the conclusion that the poetry had something personal. It was, however, beyond him to make out what it was and the only word by which he could qualify it, was "mysticism", an element which he thought the most detestable in an

English poet. Hazlitt, the faithful collaborator of Leigh Hunt in the *Examiner*, judged Wordsworth's poetry more favourably, at least in moments when his criticism was not inspired by party politics. He was a more discerning critic than Jeffrey, and his keen insight made him immediately discover the originality of the work. He even fairly closely defined the poet's purpose and method when he wrote that Wordsworth "communicated interest and dignity to the primal movements of the heart of man, and ingrafted his own conscious reflections on the casual thoughts of hinds and shepherds". Indeed, Wordsworth would probably have come much earlier into his own, if Hazlitt's critical reviews had been written in a more sympathetic tone. The criticisms of Coleridge and Wilson introduced a series of favourable judgments, in all of which the stress was laid on the significance of the philosophic element. Coleridge, for instance, praised Wordsworth's "truth to Nature" and his "philosophical pathos", Wilson admired "the ethereal purity" of the poems and the interpretation in them of "the silent laws of the Universe", while John Stuart Mill, although no Wordsworthian, recognised the healing power of the poetry. But, in general, they merely detailed what had already been observed by Hazlitt. Henry Taylor was the first who conceived Wordsworth's philosophy as a unity. This was an important step forward towards the recognition of Wordsworth's teachership, and when, early in the 'seventies, Sir Leslie Stephen ventured to speak in his essay, *Wordsworth's Ethics*, of a system, it seemed as if the 'reality' of the philosophy was an established fact for ever and for anybody. Not so for Arnold! He denied that the philosophic element in Wordsworth's poetry had any value and he turned particularly against Stephen's view that "a scientific system of thought" was embodied in it. But the days of Jeffrey were past. The reading public might still remain indifferent to Wordsworth's poetry (he never equalled Tennyson in popularity), but the critics were unanimous in their judgment that Wordsworth belonged to the great philosophic poets, and among them Arnold stood quite alone with his idea that Wordsworth's philosophy was but an illusion.

It only remained to estimate and analyse this system as a whole. This work was done by critics like Bagehot, Shairp, Hutton, Myers; and De Vere also contributed to it. His essay is not only a defence against Arnold, but also an exposition of Wordsworth's philosophy viewed as a unity. He tried to bring out in full relief the systematic character of it by treating it in connection with: 1. the moral relations

of man; 2. the political relations; 3. poetry, art, science, culture; 4. creation; 5. the problems which concern the origin and the end of man as a spiritual and immortal being.

De Vere's discussion of the first three points is of little importance in so far that these subjects had been more than once analysed by earlier critics. The remarks that Wordsworth in his moral teaching started from two natures in man, a higher and a lower nature, between which there was always strife, that the poet was a "lover of liberty", and that his wisdom was not drawn from books, nor acquired from study of the world, but resembled "the wisdom of the anchoret in the desert", were no longer new and also on other points there was no real difference between De Vere's views and those of other critics. Besides, this part of Wordsworth's teaching required least explanation: it is simple and forms, as it were, only an introduction to the higher philosophy, which De Vere dealt with next.

Even in this field he could do little pioneer-work. Wordsworth's attitude towards the problem of creation had already been described in the analysis of his Natural Religion and of his function as a Prophet of Nature; and his views about the pre-existence of the soul had been discussed more than once. But De Vere tried to give a personal touch to his treatment of these subjects by combining his exposition of Wordsworth's higher philosophy with a paraphrase of the *Vernal Ode* and of the *Ode on Intimations of Immortality*. He also communicated some interest to his discussion of Wordsworth's ideas about the origin of the soul by interspersing it with a few personal remarks, for instance, his answer to the question how far the Pythagorean teaching respecting the pre-existence of the soul (divested of the 'Transmigration'-theory) was seriously believed by Wordsworth: "In his later life I once heard him say that he had held it with a poetic, not a religious faith. When he wrote the poem he might perhaps have expressed a more ardent adhesion to it"; to which De Vere added: "He might, however, have held the doctrine of his Ode on theological as well as on philosophical grounds, so closely allied it is to an opinion entertained by some theologians, viz. that each human soul not only sees its Judge immediately after death, but saw its Creator also, for a brief moment, at the instant of its creation"[15]). Concerning the poet's sensibility in this matter De Vere believed that Wordsworth was endowed with some talismanic power, not unlike a child's, which enabled him *to experience* the feeling of his soul having pre-existed.

[15]) Aubrey de Vere, *Essays, Chiefly on Poetry;* vol. I, p. 259.

In some way, De Vere thought, it was connected with Wordsworth's extreme sensibility to Nature.

There was one subject in De Vere's exposition of the poet's philosophy which was entirely new, viz. Wordsworth's attitude towards the function of sound in creation. Coleridge, De Vere affirmed, had planned in his youth to write 'Orphic Odes', of which design his *Hymn to the Earth* and his unfinished *Hymn to the Sun* survive as memorials. From him Wordsworth took the idea that led to the writing of *Stanzas on the Power of Sound*, a poem in which the Pythagorean teaching, and, later on, Plato's theory, on 'The Music of the Spheres', is embodied. It was intended, De Vere alleged, to have had a place in that poem of which the *Excursion* is a part, and was anticipated by some passages in the seventh Book. In his discussion of it he pursued his habitual method of paraphrasing the poem, meanwhile giving a general idea of the Pythagorean teaching. But the poem, as he understood it, aimed at a truth even "loftier than any philosopher of antiquity dreamed of", and it is in his exposition of this truth that we feel De Vere warming again to his favourite subject, the contemplation of the created universe as a reflection of the Divine state. For, besides viewing the ear and the eye as the gates between the worlds of matter and of mind ("Sacraments of Nature, feeding without intermission man's intellect and imagination"), he also liked to think of the two senses as 'spiritual functionaries', of which the faculty of hearing, in the same way as the faculty of seeing is to feast for ever on the Beatific Vision, is intended to listen in perfect contentment to "the Voice that existed before Creation", "the Voice which shall summon the sleepers from their graves", "the Voice which shall last for ever". These thoughts, De Vere explained, were embodied in the last stanza of the poem. He admired this ode and he concluded this part of his essay with the complaint: "That a poem so great in conception, and so perfect in execution, should have remained so long but scantly appreciated even by Wordsworth's admirers is a painful illustration of that narrowness which too often limits the poetic sympathies".

The third essay, *The Personal Character of Wordsworth's Poetry*, was a lecture read before the Wordsworth Society in 1883. In it De Vere dealt with Wordsworth, the man and the poet, and illustrated how some of the principal elements that constituted his poetic genius, were often in opposition, yet in harmony with each other, as e.g. meditation and observation, imagination and fancy, creativeness and

passiveness. However, it did not add anything new to what De Vere had written in the two other essays; it was mainly another grouping of the same ideas.

On the whole, Wordsworth did not, to use Arnold's words, "bring so much luck" to the critic De Vere as Spenser did. His essay on 'passion' in Wordsworth's poetry is far less solid and less convincing in its arguments and illustration than either of those on the Elizabethan poet and is marked by his striving to defend the work of his favourite master against any fault-finding. It may be that the interpretation of the term 'passion' given by De Vere was the right one in the eyes of poets like Scott, Coleridge, and Wordsworth — an interpretation also put upon it by Edmund Gosse in his *Modern English Literature* (p. 304), and probably taken over from his friend's essay —, but we do not think that the half dozen examples of love, of wrath, and of the terrible in Wordsworth's poetry will convince the reader that in its spirit the bulk of his poetry was impassioned. If 'passion' is to express only violent extremes of feeling, Wordsworth's poetry was certainly without it. The second essay, too, is perhaps less lively and less interesting than the one on Spenser's philosophy; only, we must make an exception for the discussion of the theory on sound.

It was not any high poetic quality in their work that led De Vere to devote an article to each of the poets Trench, Ferguson, Patmore, and Taylor. None of them could really call himself his equal in the poetic art. Surely, not Richard Chenevix Trench. He had made a name as a student of philology and as a writer of Mediaeval Church History, but the two volumes of poems which he collected and published in 1885, a year before his death, did not mark him as a poet of distinction. With "seriousness", "philosophical thought", and "inspiration of hope" De Vere had enumerated the chief merits of those volumes, in which, on the other hand, he noticed "a melancholy and saturnine temperament', and "an extreme plainness of diction, which it must be owned is sometimes carried to exaggeration". These were, in De Vere's opinion, the characteristics of poems like *The Prize of Song, Orpheus and the Sirens,* and *The Monk and the Bird,* which three he deemed the best of the collection, and his criticism consisted chiefly in combining some general remarks with a paraphrase of these poems. In connection with the story *The Monk and the Bird* (which has the same subject as Longfellow's *Golden Legend,* and

the German tale of *The Monk of Heisterbach,* or, *Of Hildesheim),* De Vere observed that "in origin it is not Teutonic. The late Professor Eugene O'Curry, in his invaluable *Lectures on the Manuscript Materials of Ancient Irish History,* refers to a very early Irish manuscript in which it is extant".

But then, it was not De Vere's intention to subject Trench's recent edition to a minute analysis. The poetry appealed to him because it was the work of an Irishman and a Unionist, but especially because he recognised in it the same predilection for religious subjects as had characterized his own poetry. It was this element in Trench's volumes which he made the theme of his article, and he might with equal justice have called it: An Essay on Religious Poetry. In it he summed up the merits and demerits of religious and secular poetry and concluded that there was no ground for the assertion that religious subjects were unfit for verse, although he admitted that "there are doctrines, and also facts, belonging to religion, which are too sacred for detailed poetical illustration; and that even well-intended attempts thus to illustrate them have often had an alloy of over-familiarity, if not of coarseness, repulsive to refined minds". After this comparison he pointed out the various ways in which religious feeling had manifested itself in poetry, which amounted to an instructive survey of the poets since Chaucer in whose work the expression of religiousness was discernible. And he did not limit his subject to English poets only. He also discussed in this respect some features of Dante's work, and of Calderon's, the latter being introduced obviously because Trench had translated fragments from his *Autos Sacramentales.* In like manner De Vere treated another element with reference to Trench's poetry, viz. patriotism, with which he concluded his essay.

It need hardly be stated to which of De Vere's poetic sympathies his review of Sir Samuel Ferguson's poetry owed its origin. Both had been friendly rivals in the endeavour to introduce the ancient Irish legend to the reading public of England and he gladly hailed the two volumes of his brother-bard which were published at the latter's death in 1886. However, his essay was no serious attempt at literary criticism; in it he was more concerned with the subject of the poetry than with the poet himself. Its main substance consists in an account of the stories of *Conary, The Naming of Cuchullin, Congal,* and *Aideen's Grave,* the four poems which he noticed as the best in Ferguson's work, and to this account he added a few historical notes to make the subject more intelligible to "those indolent readers who shrink

from all themes except such as they are used to, — men of that species of intelligence which is well pleased to have its own coals stirred up to brighter flame, but sends out a jet of smoke in the face of one who throws fresh aliment on the fire". De Vere complained that Ferguson's poetry was not so widely read as it should be. He regretted that the speeches in the poems were often too long and that the illustrations of ancient history were too frequent, but he praised the work warmly for its "originality" and its "Irish spirit".

The article on Patmore is perhaps the most important of those on the "minor poets". Not that in its character it differed greatly from the others; but it was concerned with two poems which at that time had a wide circulation and brought immediate fame to their author. Headed by critics like John Ruskin a host of admirers sang Patmore's greatness in various keys of enthusiasm and even to the present day the poet has never lacked worshippers, although their number must gradually have dwindled to a minority.

From the standpoint of literary criticism De Vere's essay is interesting because it was an early voice in the choir of friendly critics. It was not a scientific study. It was a review of the *Angel in the House* and of the first edition of *The Unknown Eros,* the latter volumes not having then (1877) been published, and the method pursued in it was the same as that applied by De Vere in the other articles, that is to say, he recounted the contents of the two poems and explained them, while quoting copiously from them. But the critical element was not wholly absent. The subject of the *Angel in the House,* the holiness of domestic love, and of *The Unknown Eros,* the beauty of supernatural love, was a theme which fascinated De Vere, who had written on it more than once, and this strong appeal to his poetic sympathies made his explanation of the poems in itself a critical appreciation. As for De Vere's enthusiasm, he bestowed his praise on the poet as unstintedly as in Tennyson's case. Patmore was one of his particular friends, like him a convert to Catholicism, and in poetry a congenial spirit. The only hint in his essay at weaknesses in the poems is that "in a very few instances" Patmore had written "with less eminent success". De Vere noted as special merits in Patmore's work "elevation of thought and sentiment, vigour, descriptive power, expressiveness of diction, and metrical felicity". It is characteristic of his own poetic tastes that he did not speak much about Patmore's mysticism, but he mentioned this element and seemed to refer to it

in the intermezzo on 'Obscurity', in which he defended Patmore against false charges on this head.

The article derives a special interest from the passage in which De Vere speaks of the poetical aphorisms in the *Angel of the House,* which are known as 'The Sentences'. One of the statements made there bears on the influence of De Vere on Patmore. With respect to this point Wilfrid Meynell expressed his regret, later on, (in his review of W. Ward's *Memoir of Aubrey de Vere*) that the literary world had been left in the dark about certain omissions, proposed by De Vere, in one of Patmore's poems, which omissions were a great improvement. The following sentence partially clears up this mystery: "The present edition (i.e. the second of the *Angel in the House*) is much improved by the rejection of *these* passages, and would be further improved by the rejection of them which have been allowed to remain in an altered form"[16]). This statement tells us that the poem referred to by Meynell was the *Angel in the House,* and that the omissions in question will become known by comparing the first with the second edition. De Vere's article would have been still more interesting if he had specified which proposed omissions Patmore had allowed to stand.

Henry Taylor's work came in for no less than three essays, one on his *Minor Poems,* and two on his Dramas. He was De Vere's most intimate friend and related to him by marriage. They had often talked on poetic principles, on which occasions the younger poet had always looked up to the other as to a wise mentor. But as regards Taylor's achievements in the art of letters not even De Vere could make it plausible in his essays that the success with which his friend's work had met in the earlier part of his career was quite deserved. For want of any other outstanding quality than "a vivid reality" in the Minor Poems he enlarged in his review of them on this element in poetry and wound up with a discourse on Poetic Truth in the Wordsworthian manner. His method in dealing with Taylor's dramas was very similar: he described the plots and character in *Edwin the Fair, St. Clement's Eve,* and *A Sicilian Summer* (also called *The Virgin Widow*), and then, after having given a general estimate of the author's dramatic power, passed on to a comparison between the Elizabethan and the Victorian drama. But, perhaps, this method was again design; for De Vere had been a dramatist himself and his critical work would have been incomplete as a defence of his own poetry, if

[16]) Aubrey de Vere, *Essays Literary and Ethical;* p. 139.

he had not devoted part of his essays to this art. At any rate, he could not have selected a more typical exponent of the dramatic art in Victorian times than Sir Henry Taylor.

e. Arnold, Shairp, and De Vere

They are an ill-assorted company, it would seem, this Agnostic, this High-Churchman, and this Catholic; and yet, among all the Victorian writers with whom De Vere as a critic might be compared, no other names suggest themselves more readily than those of Matthew Arnold and John C. Shairp. They are the names of men who occupied a prominent position among the literary critics of their time, who were regarded by many of their contemporaries as the highest authorities in the art, and who in our days have almost come to be identified with the literary criticism of the second half of the 19th century. No writer of that period dealing with religious, ethical, or literary subjects could well hope to have the qualities of his work discussed without the names of Arnold and Shairp being brought in and having his opinions compared with theirs. No man less so than De Vere, who was their contemporary proper and who shared with them a vivid interest in things religious, cultural, and literary.

However, literary fame and conformity in literary interests are not factors sufficient in themselves to justify a comparison with Arnold and Shairp above all others, seeing that there are several contemporary writers who are at least well-known in literature and who on the basis of having literary interests in common with De Vere could serve equally well as illustrators of his opinions and qualities as a critic. Walter Bagehot, for instance, left three volumes of *Literary Studies,* and, when occupied with literature, wrote mainly of poets and poetry, notably of Classicism and Romanticism, which subjects must be held of great importance in De Vere's prose-writings. Richard Church shared with him a great love for the middle ages, while Henry Morley, like De Vere, had a critical taste for editorial work. Richard Holt Hutton stood in an even closer relation to De Vere. Of all his contemporaries he shows himself to have read De Vere's literary nature best and he was greatly interested in his poetry. Among other things he reviewed the dramas *St. Thomas* and *Alexander* in the Spectator. If De Vere's religious and ethical essays are not quite disregarded, the relation between the two writers becomes closer still, for when writing these De Vere had more than once his eye upon Hutton's theories.

A comparison between the two men was actually made by Wilfrid Ward in his *Memoir* (pp. 313-315). Then there are the Catholics, Newman, Allingham, Alice Meynell, Patmore, and perhaps Francis Thompson, who have all, it would seem, a special claim on De Vere as his co-religionists. They certainly are a more congenial company than that of an Agnostic and a High-Churchman.

And yet, for all the ill-assortedness of the company (and perhaps just because of this), Arnold and Shairp are the men with whom De Vere's work is most inevitably associated and who illustrate the true character of his criticism best. Bagehot, Hutton, Church, and Henry Morley had not been poets in their earlier career, and the poetical temperament was an outstanding feature in De Vere's criticism. It is what made him essentially a literary critic. The very claim to this title is sometimes denied to both Bagehot and Hutton. In the *Cambridge History of English Literature* Professor Hugh Walker styled Bagehot "essentially a publicist and an economist", and his literary essays are called there a "by-product". The same authority classed Hutton with the theological writers. As for the Catholics most of them had been poets; but Newman's literary criticism was little more than occasional and even in Allingham and Alice Meynell it could hardly be called a second nature equal to the first in importance. Patmore's criticism is as different in character from De Vere's as Thompson's. Just as in their poetry, these two men were led mainly by artistic and aesthetic principles and sought first beauty as it is expressed in form, melody, style, and imagery; whereas De Vere, like Arnold and Shairp, was chiefly interpretative and measured the value of literary works by their beauty of thought and their educational power. Patmore and Thompson were akin to critics like Ruskin, Walter Pater, and Swinburne, who did not sympathize very much with the Wordsworthian art in poetry and who in criticism represented another 'school' than the one to which De Vere, Arnold, and Shairp belonged.

Among the 19th century critics there is one whose professional path runs close beside De Vere's. This is his friend and fellow-countryman, Edward Dowden (1843-1913), who was professor of Poetry at Trinity College, Dublin, from 1867. Already early in his career he was held in high esteem in England for the soundness of his literary judgment and ever since the time of his contributions to the study of Shakespeare he has been looked upon as the great rival of Arnold and Shairp in academic criticism. In poetry he showed himself an admirer of Wordsworth and imparted to his verse the same religious thoughtfulness as

that by which De Vere's poems are marked. In their prose the resemblance between the literary natures of the two poet-critics extended even farther; for in a similar way as in De Vere Dowden's sympathies were divided between the Romanticists of 1800 and the Elizabethans. If one half of his literary fame was won by such works as *Shakspere, his Mind and Art* (1875), and the *Shakspere Primer* (1877), the other half was not less deservedly won by his excellent study of Southey and his more ambitious work, *The Life of Shelley* (Kegan Paul, 2 vols. 1886). As another proof of similarity between the critical tastes of the two men may stand Dowden's editions of *Hamlet,* of *Romeo and Juliet,* of Shakespeare's *Sonnets,* of Wordsworth's and Shelley's poems, of Southey's and Henry Taylor's *Correspondence.* Also in their general conception of the critical function they were two kindred souls: in criticism Dowden applied the same moral standard of Christian Truth as De Vere did, and in his manner of discussing works he was interpretative rather than artistic. In this respect he was as academical as De Vere, Arnold, and Shairp, and he therefore belonged to the same 'school'.

And yet he stands in another position towards him than Arnold and Shairp. He was not his contemporary in the same sense as they were. He was born about thirty years later than De Vere, which makes an important difference, especially because the tendencies of Victorianism were rapidly changing when Dowden entered upon his career. It is true that he had already written a large part (and perhaps the weightier portion) of his work before 1889, but he began as a critic when De Vere's principles and method were fixed. That Dowden had caught the new spirit already is easily seen in his work. He was a mere boy at the time when difficulties in religion, culture, and education, left their indelible imprint on every mature literary mind and, consequently, in his later life his thoughts remained almost unaffected by these problems. He did write occasionally on ethical subjects in his shorter articles, but they never filled such a large place in his literary work as in De Vere's. Instead, he preferred to devote himself largely to research-work, especially in the biographical line and in this way he, like Edmund Gosse and Professor Saintsbury (who were also born in the 'forties), became one of those who handed down to the twentieth century the more advanced views and methods of scientific criticism in the Victorian age. De Vere lived in the same world of thought as Arnold and Shairp. He was interested in Dowden's work and he rejoiced in his fame, but he looked upon him as a younger one,

as a critic who belonged to the next generation, and on account of the disparity of age between them his literary criticism had little or no connection with Dowden's writings. But it had with the work of Arnold and Shairp.

The strongest tie by which De Vere, Arnold, and Shairp as critics are bound together and by which they are distinguished from all other contemporaries is that they were teachers. In his *Lives of the Poets* Johnson wrote that Dryden's criticism was the criticism of a poet; with as much truth this might be said of these three men, who had practised poetry for many years and who remained true to their calling even when abandoning the poetical form to express their thoughts and sympathies more effectively in another. But the chief characteristic of their poetical temperament they had retained in it: in poetry they had been largely didactic, the three of them, although in Shairp's case this element is less conspicuous perhaps, because he had been a poet on a humbler scale than Arnold and De Vere; and in their prose-work didacticism is again the keynote. Fate had predestined them from the outset to be teachers of their time. For, born as they were in the first quarter of the 19th century, they had been the direct inheritors of a legacy of a twofold character: the Romantic movement caused a revolution in cultural as well as in literary principles; and as critics they felt it their business to deal with both.

Arnold, Shairp, De Vere, — this is the order in which they presented themselves to the public, and this is the order in which they should be treated. For there is a relation of succession between the writings of the three critics. Arnold's teaching provoked antagonism on the part of the two others, while Shairp in his turn, as the earlier defender of Christian principles, influenced De Vere. In Shairp's work the opposition to Arnold's doctrines is perhaps less apparent, but in De Vere's the antagonistic spirit is all the more conspicuous. He sometimes even opposed Shairp when he thought that the latter's philosophy of life or his literary standard was not quite acceptable from the true Christian standpoint or tended to diminish the greatness of his literary idols. But these cases are very rare. On the whole the similarity between them was greater than the difference and the two critics were fairly at one in their antagonism to Arnold. It was the natural antagonism of a High-Churchman and a Catholic to an Agnostic, in which the two Christians found each other.

Matthew Arnold is a typical representative of liberal thought in the 19th century, that mode of thinking which was marked by the endeav-

our to steer clear of "the falsehood of extremes". In a vague way it was a system of humanitarian ethics, in which the supernatural was left out of sight and in which the principle "to give a fair play to the mind on any subject" dominated. It had no definite creed of its own, but stood for many things: it was often another name for materialism, for glorification of science, for rationalism, for latitudinarianism, for agnosticism. To say that Arnold was all this, that he was in the fullest sense of the terms a materialist, a disciple of science, a rationalist, a latitudinarian, and an agnostic, would be putting things too boldly, perhaps, in the face of many seeming proofs to the contrary; besides, it would be giving him at the same time too much credit for a deep thinker. He could not nearly be put on a level with men like Maurice, Mill, Darwin, or Thomas Huxley. But still, whatever the degree in which these elements in him should be qualified, they are all discernible in his writings and no sympathetic critic can plead him wholly free from any of these mental attitudes.

What Arnold valued, and valued only, was life, earthly life, and the world; anything beyond this was nothing to him. In his opinion how to make the best of life, and how to live, were the only questions that mattered. Religion had no place in his teaching. He had a great dislike for anything spiritual, for metaphysics, for theology, indeed, for philosophy in any form, although he sometimes dabbled in it; but most of all he despised religion, especially dogmatic religion. Speaking in his essay, *On the Study of Poetry,* of religion and philosophy he wanted to know what were they "but the shadows and dreams and false shows of knowledge". Newman doubted his Christianity, and when Newman expressed doubt, conviction was not far behind. Critics like Frederick Harrison, G. W. E. Russell (the editor of his letters), and Professor Dowden, sought vainly in his work for any proof of practical religion in him, and Professor Saintsbury sneered at the mere suggestion of it. Indeed, it is hard to call a man religious, or even a Christian, who denied the personality of God, who denied miracles (*Literature and Dogma*), and "to whom all creeds were anathema", as Herbert W. Paul, one of Arnold's most sympathetic critics, admitted (*English Men of Letters,* Arnold, 1915). He did not possess tolerance enough to make his inspectorship of the Nonconformist schools a joy to him; he called Catholicism and Protestantism "superstitions" (*On the Study of Celtic Literature*), and as to his alleged veneration for the Church of England, there are, it is true, occasional professions of esteem for that Church in his works, but

they may be matched with as many proofs of his contempt for her dignitaries, as e.g. his treatment of Bishop Butler and Bishop Colenso. Even his attempt to gather all Dissenters (save the Catholics) into one national Church (*St. Paul and Protestantism*) was nothing but a freak, one of those inconsistencies to which the vagueness of his liberal ideas made him liable. In reality he was one of those who were not exactly atheists, but who, as Newman said in his *Grammar of Assent*, "do not know what they believe and what they do not". Thomas Huxley invented the term "agnostics" for such "Christians".

The absence of religious faith in Arnold's writings gives to his teaching that indefiniteness and vagueness which is characteristic of all systems from which religious principles have been rejected. In his essays he often used the word 'Truth', as for instance in the following sentence, which may be said to contain the whole of his cultural aims: "Let us organise and combine a party to pursue truth and new thought, let us call it 'The Liberal Party', and let us all stick to each other and back each other up" (*On the Function of Criticism*). But what meaning the word 'truth' had for him he knew no more than Pilate. Apparently he wanted to arrive at truth by the combined efforts of all mankind, but after reading such a statement as this: "There can be no surer proof of a narrow and ill-instructed mind than to think and uphold that what a man takes to be the truth on religious matters is always to be proclaimed", one wonders what practical results of this method Arnold had figured to himself, when individuals were not allowed to speak out! He more than once professed that he hated individualism, but his work should not be too closely pressed for proofs of strict adherence to this principle, for no man was more dogmatic in his teaching than Arnold. Vagueness is the impression conveyed to us when we hear Arnold talk garrulously on a few general, unproved assertions, a method too often applied by men who try to conceal their lack of "fresh ideas"; and there is hollowness in his very appeal to the world. For men, like Arnold, who in their "criticism of life" have no fixed principles to go by, fear to strive alone and try to find strength in the thought that joint action will lead to something: "Let us conceive of the whole group of civilised nations as being, for intellectual and spiritual purposes, one great confederation, bound to a joint action and working towards a common result; a confederation whose members have a due knowledge both of the past, out of which they all proceed, and of one another" (*On the Function of Criticism*). Arnold had expressed the same desire a few times before this; but

then, repetition is another trick to talk much and say little.

Perhaps the only thought which had taken any positive shape in his mind was that the greatness of Classicism ought to be the basis of all culture. In his life-long war against *Philistinism* he put forward knowledge, especially knowledge of the Classics, as the panacea for "the vulgarity, the coarseness, and the unintelligence of the Middle Classes in England". He had a great love for the Classics. He lectured on them and most critics are agreed that he knew them well. But even this discipleship failed to give backbone to Arnold's cultural system. His acceptation of Classicism as "the very best" in art leaves the reader with a notion of it as vague as the meaning of "the grand style of the Classics" which he left undefined, and at least one of the words "truth and seriousness", which in his opinion were the characteristic qualities of Classicism, has again the familiar suspicious sound. It makes us conjecture that it was not truth which compelled his admiration for the Ancients, but that it was by the heathen character of their literature and the absence in it of all troublesome religious thought that Classicism so strongly appealed to him.

Arnold's literary criticism suffers from the same evil of vagueness and inconsistency as the other part of his cultural teaching. His essays abound with truisms like: "The best poetry is what we want", "We must accustom ourselves to a high standard and to a strict judgment", "We should conceive of poetry worthily"; and he himself supplied the hall-mark "dry generalities" for much of their substance. Most of them are on poetry, and classicism is the only standard by which Arnold judges: "If a poet is a dubious classic, let us sift him; if he is a false classic, let us explode him. But if he is a real classic, if his work belongs to the class of the very best (for this is the true and right meaning of the word *Classic, Classical*), then the great thing for us is to feel and enjoy his work as deeply as ever we can". This is the Arnoldian method all over. He called Classics those poets who were the very best in the world and he put an end to all argument by saying that the very best were those who were generally recognised as such: Homer, Virgil, Shakespeare, Milton, Goethe, and, because he could not very well omit him, Dante. Having got this standard ready he recommended as a fine working method "to have always in one's mind lines and expressions of these great masters, and to apply them as a touchstone to other poetry". It is a queer procedure for a critic to derive his standard from the general opinion of his readers and then to teach them what this standard must be! No doubt it

would have been 'a greater thing', if Arnold had told us why they have a claim to the first place in the literature of the world and in what the excellence consists of the few lines which he gives of them as illustrations. This would have caused him some trouble, especially with Dante.

What Arnold's method as a critic led to is best seen from his survey of the English poets. He called Shakespeare, Milton, and the Elizabethans Classics of English poetry; but if anybody expected Arnold to analyse these poets particularly, since they are to be the standard poets for others, he will be disappointed, for Arnold says: "For my present purpose I need not dwell on our Elizabethan poetry, or on the continuation of this poetry in Milton. We all of us profess to be agreed in the estimate of this poetry". Most astonishing of all is that in this survey Arnold did not apply his touchstone of "lines and expressions" to a single poet; it even seems as if in his critical judgment of each he had forgotten what he had said of his standard. No English poet had his claim to the title of a Classic tested by Truth, that quality so prominent in classicism, in Arnold's eyes, and Chaucer was the only one to whom this title was denied on the ground that he lacked 'Seriousness'. Wordsworth was found wanting, because he had no completeness and had not read enough books; Byron, because he was empty of matter; and Shelley, because he was not sane and so incoherent. But what did Arnold care about consistency and accuracy where poets with whom he did not sympathize, were concerned? In his heart he judged them by a quite different criterion: he viewed them all from the standpoint of a Liberal, and if the work of any of them could not fully be interpreted as serving the cause of earthly man, — that is to say, if it was too religious, too philosophical, too metaphysical, too faintly earth-bound, — it found little favour in his eyes. Poets like Tennyson, Byron, Wordsworth, Shelley, Burns, and Chaucer, were too personal for Arnold; they did not fully regard themselves as members of one vast community. Even Milton and Shakespeare did not come out without a scratch: Arnold disliked the subject and treatment of Milton's *Paradise Lost,* and he did not admire Shakespeare so enthusiastically as his contemporaries did (Cf. H. W. Paul, *op. cit.*). Of the modern poets Goethe was the only real and flawless Classic, because "he knew life and the world"; and also Keats, Arnold thought, would have been one, had he lived longer. For the rest, Arnold could not extend so much unstinted praise to all the poets from Milton's time up to Tennyson inclusive as a few ob-

scure Frenchmen, like Maurice de Guérin and Amiel, received from him.

To this gospel of vagueness and generalities, this "impalpable gospel", as Saintsbury calls it, Shairp opposed his teaching of well-defined views and practical wisdom. John Campbell Shairp (1819-1885) became professor of Poetry at Oxford in 1877, having succeeded Sir Francis Doyle, who in his turn had succeeded Arnold in 1867. Before this he had been Principal of the United College of St. Salvator and St. Leonard, at St. Andrews (Scotland), which function has made him currently known in English literature as Principal Shairp. With slight alterations he collected the lectures given in Scotland and England in three volumes: *Culture and Religion* (1870), *Poetic Interpretation of Nature* (1877), and *Aspects of Poetry* (1881). However, he had already published a volume before these in 1868: *Studies in Poetry and Philosophy*, which did not contain lectures, but articles contributed to the *North British Review*. There were four of them: on Wordsworth, on Coleridge, on Keble, and on The Moral Motive Power. They drew the attention of the critics and of the reading public, running into their seventh edition in 1887, and probably played a decisive part in his election for the Chair of Poetry. At any rate, from this first volume the authorities of the University might safely conclude that the choice of Shairp as Professor of Poetry would never give them cause to regret it, for the essays marked their author as a man steadfast in the Faith, and able to cope with any scholar in the island as regards literary judgment and erudition. They showed a unity both of thought and of purpose, for their subjects were all concerned with the relation between the divine life and that of man, Wordsworth representing the prophet of Nature, Coleridge the thinker, Keble the singer, while the last essay dealt with the great moving force which helps man to become what he perceives that he should be; and to interpret the poetic function in this way was a conception quite in the spirit of orthodox Anglicanism and therefore bound to appeal to the Oxford sense of tradition.

Shairp held Arnold as a colleague and as a man of letters in great respect. Notwithstanding the difference between their views of life there was a bond of close friendship between them and Shairp's recognition of Arnold's merits was genuine enough to extract from him tributes of sincere praise for his work, in verse as well as in prose. In his essay on Keble he wrote with reference to Arnold,

Professor of Poetry at the time of writing: "The present gifted occupant of that Chair has fortunately been set free (i.e. from delivering lectures in the Latin language), and has vindicated the newly acquired freedom by enriching our literature with the finest poetical criticism it has received since the days of Coleridge". However, neither friendship nor acknowledgement of Arnold's services to literature prevented Shairp from resolutely taking his stand against Arnold's Liberal doctrines, and in the third lecture of *Culture and Religion* he exposed the fallacy of his cultural teaching.

This booklet, a course of five lectures, is remarkable for the wide grasp with which the author treats his subject. For not only did he analyse it elaborately both from the standpoint of the culturist and of the religionist, but he also looked at it historically, starting from the two ancient centres of illumination, Greece, as the source of intellectual, Jerusalem, as the source of spiritual culture, and developing their providential position in the creation of Christianity up to his own time. After this introduction he proceeded to discuss the claims of scientific culture, represented by Thomas Huxley, and of literary culture, represented by Matthew Arnold. Shairp condemned both theories, Huxley's because it discarded religion altogether, and Arnold's because it assigned to religion only a secondary place. It was friendship and respect for Arnold which made Shairp say that Arnold "recognised religion as an element, and a very important one, in his theory". In his heart he knew better: religion could not be made subordinate to culture and still be religion. He himself had declared that "there are things which are either ends in themselves or they are nothing; and such, I conceive, religion is". He held with Arnold that a knowledge of "the great deeds, the high thoughts, the beautiful creations which the best men of former times have bequeathed to us" was indispensable for a true culture, but he differed from him in placing religion supreme. In this respect Shairp's standpoint was very much like De Vere's. Both looked on culture and religion as inseparably bound up with each other, but they regarded religion as the higher end. De Vere would gladly have endorsed Shairp's view that "Culture must culminate in Religion, and Religion must expand into Culture". Only, there was the difference of degree between them. Shairp, while recognising the 'hand-maiden position' of culture, did not therefore lower it unduly, whereas De Vere often laid the stress on religion at the cost of culture. Although *Culture and Religion* is Shairp's most 'religious' work, he always keeps in view that he is

a lecturer, whose aim is to form first men who could push their way in the world, and whom he must teach what were the right views to entertain in such a time of intellectual revulsions as his own. In his mind the idea of a university was more vivid than in De Vere's. Therefore he does not seem to sacrifice the importance of scientific and intellectual culture to the spiritual, as De Vere often does, but he takes the word 'Culture' in the full sense in which the Early Victorians had accepted it from the high-priest of 'Bildung', Goethe, But for this difference in degree between the two men, and the differences caused by personal peculiarities, the one might almost have been substituted for the other, and the lectures held at Oxford might have been delivered at Dublin, and reversely, with the full approval of the authorities on both sides. How closely their thoughts on the nature and the function of religion followed one line may appear from De Vere's exposition, in *Modern Unbelief*, of the faculty by which Theism is apprehended outside the field of Science and Logic, which exposition is very much the same as Shairp's in his *Combination of Religion and Culture.*

Shairp's purely literary criticism has nothing of the vagueness and indefiniteness of Arnold's essays. His standpoint is that of a true High-Churchman who holds that "the Christian standard we must take to be the highest known among men". In this he was opposed to Arnold; but the spirit of opposition was never strong in his work. In *Aspects of Poetry* there are only three chapters out of fifteen, *Criticism and Creation, Poetic Style in Modern English Poetry,* and *Shelley as a Lyric Poet,* which are reminiscent of corresponding subjects in Arnold's essays, and in *Poetic Interpretation of Nature* the subject is almost wholly outside Arnold's sphere of criticism. Shairp was not accustomed to write with one eye upon the work of others. He was a man with a cause of his own, which was: to give an unbiassed interpretation of poetry. Arnold had been one-sided in his conception of the critical function; he had represented poetry as an art which depended on the right treatment of "matter and form" only, and he had been prejudiced against all kinds of poetry that appealed to other sides of the human mind than the intellectual. He had considered only one aspect, that of Classicism, and had dismissed as not worth remembering any tendency that did not conform to its spirit. To Shairp ancient and modern poetry were equally valuable. He knew the Greek and Roman poets at least as well as Arnold did, and his admiration for them was founded perhaps on a more truly poetical

feeling, but he refused to hold the 'Romanticists' inferior to them. He used the terms 'classical' and 'romantic' rarely, partly, no doubt, because he thought them confusing, but mainly because he hated the idea of dividing poetry into classes or 'schools' and creating in this manner a sense of superiority in either direction. He liked to view poetry as a whole, as one art, which had indeed undergone changes through the successive ages, but in which each period was valuable for its own beauty and peculiar charm. If he had to distinguish at all between the two chief directions in poetry, he preferred to use the epithets 'real' and 'ideal'.

This idea of conceiving poetry as one whole underlies the two volumes: *Poetic Interpretation of Nature,* and *Aspects of Poetry.* It speaks from the long stretch of poets, covered by their several chapters, and from the author's method to treat each separate subject or poet with the same reverence and impartial love. In the first work Shairp traced the influences of Nature upon the human soul; then, trying to pursue the growth and development of this element in literature from its source, he went back as far as Hebrew poetry for the first evidence of nature-description, and passing on from Homer to Lucretius and Virgil, continued his account of it with respect to all the English poets in whose work it was of any importance, including Scottish poets like Allan Ramsay, Burns, and Walter Scott. The second work shows the same range: chapters on poetry in general, on Virgil as a religious poet, on prominent Scottish poets, including modern Gaelic bards like Duncan MacIntyre, on Wordsworth, and even on the prose-poets Carlyle and Newman. That in these essays he devoted a large part of his criticism to the poets of the nineteenth century was to some extent due to Arnold's neglect or disparagement of all that was essential in their work. If Shairp had a predilection for any particular poet, it was Wordsworth. He never wearied of praising his best poems for imagination and felicity of expression. De Vere wrote much about Wordsworth, but Shairp wrote not a page less. His admiration was as profound, and his appreciation as warmly expressed. Compared with the enthusiasm of these two men Arnold's praise of Wordsworth's work seems but cold.

De Vere's literary criticism resembles Shairp's in being equally opposed to Arnold's teaching. Both critics had started on their mission from very much the same conception of the poetical and critical functions, both advocated the same principles of Christian truth, and,

consequently, when Shairp in his essays challenged the soundness of Arnold's doctrines, De Vere was wholly on his side. But De Vere's position as an opponent was farther removed from Arnold's standpoint. In him the religious sense was stronger and therefore also the antagonistic spirit. Several of his essays show that the spirit of opposition was an important feature of his criticism. His two essays on Spenser were clearly directed against Richard Church, the one on *Modern Unbelief* aimed at Hutton's theories, the *Rule of Faith* at Darwinism, the essay on *Landor* may partly have been intended as a rehabilitation of that poet, who had been reviewed in depreciating terms by Henry Taylor many years before, and three other essays, two on *Wordsworth*, and the one on *The two Chief Schools in English Poetry*, were called forth by Arnold's work.

Closely connected with De Vere's higher valuation of the ethical side of poetry is his different mode of treating the Classics. Shairp had often allowed his critical mind to play among the Ancients, from Homer to Virgil, and the significance of their work in the world's literature was sometimes the subject of elaborate criticism with him. De Vere did not treat the Classics so generously. His references to them, although by no means inconsiderable in number, are less frequent and he never attempted any lengthy criticism of their work. If he sometimes did dwell upon it, his speculations always remained general and superficial. His sympathies lay chiefly with the middle ages and the modern times. This stepmotherly treatment of classic literature does not mean that he was less familiar with it: there is ample evidence in his work to the contrary. It had its cause in the same aversion to heathenism which after his conversion made him cut out of his poetry all reference to Greek mythology. That literature did not suit his purpose as a teacher, because it did not illustrate Christian thought. There was also another reason. De Vere wished to be first of all a popular teacher, and he always kept in view that he addressed not academics, but the average, poetry-loving Englishman, whom he supposed to be only superficially acquainted with the Classics. In his essay on *Landor's Poetry* he had given it as his opinion that "the poets of antiquity delight few save the studious at this distant day". What then was the use, he thought, of referring the reader frequently to a literature with which he was not familiar?

It was by their treatment of nineteenth century poets that Shairp and De Vere showed a striking conformity in their literary tastes.

There were differences of subject, of course: the poetry of authors like Trench, Patmore, and Ferguson particularly attracted De Vere, and his discussion of Henry Taylor's dramas was also a distinctive feature in his work; Shairp, on the other hand, had a weakness for Scottish poets. But spiritual poetry was the kind they loved most, with Wordsworth's on the highest plane. De Vere recognised in Shairp an ally, a defender of the same cause, and a critic who discharged his function in the same spirit of true love for the poetic art. He honoured his friendship and he knew his work well. This acquaintance with Shairp's publications left its mark upon De Vere's critical writings. Perhaps we do him an injustice in looking upon Shairp's method of analysing a subject on historical lines as a model for his analogous treatment of the elements 'Patriotism' and 'Religiousness' in English poetry; but Shairp certainly influenced him in some of his ideas. So, for instance, De Vere's thought that "the historic past would provide many subjects for poetry", which thought had already been expressed by Shairp (in: The Province of Poetry, *Aspects*, p. 19), to whom are also traceable De Vere's representation of Wordsworth as the Prophet of Nature and his opinion that Imagination was the great power of his poetry; and Shairp had distinguished between the two 'schools' of poetry by the terms 'real' and 'ideal', instead of Classical and Romantic, before him. Again, Shairp's praise of Trench's poetry most probably stimulated De Vere to the writing of his essay, and there is again a close resemblance in their appreciation of Shelley as a lyric poet. Of course, it is difficult to ascertain whether most of these analogies are not merely accidental; but at least some of them refuse to be explained in this way. They point to the fact that De Vere set much value on Shairp's opinion.

Of the three critics Matthew Arnold was undoubtedly the most popular. He was perhaps the most celebrated critic in the latter half of the nineteenth century, and for at least one generation after his death no other writer's work was more widely read. Of the two series *Essays in Criticism*, which constitute the most important part of his prose-writings, the first did not in the beginning meet with a cordial reception (Cf. Saintsbury, *Arnold*, p. 83), but when the second was posthumously published in 1888, much of the welcome given to the latter was accorded to the former, and from 1891 to 1916 they ran through 10 and 13 editions respectively, in the popular *Eversley Series* alone. True, Arnold's essays possess several qualities which were calculated to captivate the public mind. They embody a teaching which,

whatever its actual value may be, had all the charm of presenting a fresh and optimistic outlook upon English life and thought, and of being set forth with the wit and skill of a man who combined a rare command of the language with a keen sense of humour. Arnold was a cultural reformer. He tried to rouse his contemporaries from their apathy by denouncing their national follies and vices and by urging them to give up their insularity. Not a little of his popularity is due to the way in which he pilloried them. The English (and even the Victorians were English, perhaps the most English of the whole race) have always liked to listen to a good, not too unpolished diatribe. This is what Arnold gave them; his denunciation was free from that uncouth vehemence which had made Carlyle unpopular as a teacher; it was delivered in that playful style which takes away the edge, and besides, Arnold took care all the while to compensate for any offence given to the national pride of his contemporaries by allowing them enough of "energy and honesty". Shairp and De Vere were less lucky in hitting the popular taste. De Vere's essays did not see any other edition than Macmillan's, and even Shairp's volumes fared no better after the promising beginning of the first. In the light of Arnold's work it is easy to see why these critics failed to interest the reading public of their time. The Victorians had gradually come to believe that in the cry for more culture lay their only salvation, and that that 'more' must be something new. Shairp and De Vere did not offer them this. Culture was an important element in their work, but they were not reformers, at least not in the same sense as Arnold was. The principles on which they had built their teaching were as old as Christianity; they preached a return to the ages of Faith, when men were content to accept Christian truth in all seriousness and humility. But a return to the old ways was what the Victorians in their pride of progress disliked most.

To some extent Arnold was also a reformer of literary criticism. During a large part of the 18th century criticism had been exercised on the assumption that a poet was some inferior species of artist to be made or marred by passing a final judgment on him and by weighing the man rather than his poetry. This criticism, as Sir A. W. Ward says in his preface to the Globe edition of Pope's work, "lost itself in empty dogmatism, or strayed into the exchange of sheer personalities". Critics of this stamp looked through the work at the man. This method was continued into the first half of the 19th century by Jeffrey and his band of newspaper-reviewers, but also several better men of

letters indulged in this practice. Byron was one, Macaulay perhaps the most brilliant representative of all, and even Carlyle, although Macaulay's strenuous opponent, did not go out "Scott-free". Arnold preached another spirit; he taught that criticism should be governed by a kind love for poetry, by a spirit of urbanity and sympathy towards the poet, and that the work should be approached through the character and the ideas of the man. Arnold was the first to apply the new critical method, which had been foreshadowed by Coleridge's criticism, and of which the idea at least had already been voiced by Carlyle. But Arnold did not always act up to his own teaching; his kind love and sympathy were clearly enough expressed in the case of his favourite poets, but when dealing with the moderns, especially those of his own time, he often relapsed into the sin of his predecessors. He had the Carlylean habit of praising some writer profusely in one part of his essay, and of beating him down to the lowest depth in another. Wordsworth is an instance of this method of Arnold's; another is Shelley, who for that little praise which was bestowed on him, was killed off by being designated as "that beautiful and ineffectual angel beating in the void his luminous wings in vain" [17]); Byron, too, whom Arnold used to eulogize, had to pay dear for the fame projected by his critic. It may be doubted whether his thanksgiving retort would have been "so empty of matter" [18]), if he had had a chance to read Arnold's essays. In this respect the work of Shairp and De Vere is better fitted to exemplify the new method; they completed the reform which was heralded by Arnold. With them it would have been an impossibility to grind a poet down, to treat him as Macaulay had treated poor Montgomery, or Carlyle had "criticised" Walter Scott. Shelley, whose ideas were reprobated by both, received perhaps the first generous interpretation of his work from these two critics. It was a principle with them to gloss over the bad things in a man's work, to emphasize the good qualities, to instruct in the understanding of poetry and poets by awakening true love for both. No doubt it was criticism like theirs, rather than Arnold's, that paved the way for the literary investigations of the younger, more advanced Victorian critics.

Fortunate the man whose literary value is the subject of much controversy: he is sure to live in the annals of literature, if it were

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[17]) M. Arnold, *Essays in Criticism* (Second Series); Macmillan, 1891; p. 204.

[18]) M. Arnold, *Essays in Criticism* (First Series); Macmillan, 1894; p. 7.

only for the very fact that his claims to a place of distinction are disputed. Arnold was a man who in this way blundered into fame. He had the good luck of being, shortly after his death, alternately taken from his pedestal by one set of eminent critics, like Harrison, Dowden, and Saintsbury, and placed on it again by another group of hardly less eminent critics, like H. D. Traill, H. W. Paul, and Prof. Hugh Walker, with the result that nowadays he is looked upon either as a brilliant genius, as a hero who towers high above his contemporaries and who is to be identified with Victorian criticism, or, at the worst, as a writer whose reputation as a literary critic is still in the balance. But nobody has as yet dared to hint that from the purely literary standpoint Arnold is after all no more than a humbug, a pleasant writer who created a temporary sensation, not by his ideas, but by the boldness with which they were put forward. If his work holds any fascination it is partly by the pleasantness of his bantering style, but even more by the incredible audacity with which the author dared to hold forth on subjects of which he knew next to nothing. That he was somehow a cultural reformer of his time cannot be denied: it is alleged that the University of London was made a teaching institution at the suggestion of Arnold and that he also contributed much to the introduction of compulsory education in 1870. But there is no truth whatever in the assertion that he exercised a direct influence upon Victorian literature. The real literary reformer was Carlyle, who, as has often been maintained, was opposed by Arnold, but who was even more his model in various respects than Sainte-Beuve, Renan, Goethe, and Aristotle together. From him Arnold learned his ironical, though more refined style, the habit of introducing episodical stories (The Wragg-story), the coining of graphic names, and the trick of showing off his knowledge of German men of letters. But as a teacher in poetry Arnold is a failure. Nobody now goes to him to be guided in his study of English poetry, nobody, takes him seriously as the founder of the study of Celtic literature in England, nobody now believes in any of his literary views. His work has nothing positive in it and the only conclusion to which all critics come is that it was suggestive. (Cf. *Englische Studien*, Vol. XXXII, article on M. Arnold, by Dr. F. H. Pughe, 1903). Suggestive it was, that is to say, it suggests to the reader which opinions he must not hold!

As literary critics Shairp and De Vere are greater than Arnold, and Shairp is perhaps the greatest of the three. If we regard poetic

criticism as a mixture of intellectual and spiritual teaching in a literary setting, we may say that Arnold was essentially cultural, or intellectual, De Vere predominantly spiritual, or religious and ethical, but Shairp the most purely literary critic. His work takes up an intermediate position between that of his two one-sided rivals, but extends to the right and left, covering both. His grasp was wider than De Vere's, his treatment more penetrating and his method more original. Shairp's critical opinions are reverenced even in these days: the current idea that Newman and Ruskin are the best prose-writers in the 19th century seems to have been first expressed by him *(Aspects,* p. 54). De Vere was too much given to correcting the views of others and he was therefore less independent. Just as in his poetry he needed somebody or something to set him going. In learning Shairp probably did not surpass him; neither knew German very well, and if the one excelled in Scottish poetry (Shairp translated several Gaelic poems into English), the other was more conversant with Anglo-Irish poetry and the history of both countries. But De Vere's teaching was less scientific and less academical than Shairp's. Yet, it was as strong in its educational power.

In one respect De Vere's criticism stands out favourably in a comparison with Arnold and Shairp: his work is not disfigured by any kind of mannerism. In Arnold's essays the repeated professions of the author's modesty and bluntness are positively disgusting. To hear Arnold call himself "an unlearned belletristic trifler like me", "an unpopular author", "a plain citizen in the republic of Letters"; to hear him say: "It is not in my nature to dispute very obstinately on behalf of any opinion, even my own", or, "I have always sought to compromise others as little as possible"; or to hear him speak of "my native modesty", is more than one can bear of a critic who had to apologize to more people for his rudeness than to the Mr. Wright who translated Homer's Iliad. Such self-effacement is a cheap trick intended to invite the opinion of the good-natured reader, who is expected to applaud such a heroic pose. Byron practised something very like it. Shairp, too, had his mannerisms, although they are of a more innocent character. In his lectures he more than once apologizes for having to oppose the views of living writers, and he has a habit of insisting on the responsibility of the high function he holds. Sometimes this consciousness evinces itself in an expression of gratitude to the authorities of the University. Such personal notes, just as Shairp's habit of swerving into by-paths, pertain more to the

lecturer than to the essayist. De Vere's work is free from taints like these. He wrote his essays with the same impersonality as that which marks a large part of his poetry, and it is perhaps this quality, more than any other, which gives especially to his ethical prose-writings the character of having been written not only for his contemporaries, but "for all time".

IV. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

If in our answer to the question whether Aubrey de Vere is more valuable as a poet or as a critic we were to rely on the judgment of his contemporaries, there would be little cause for hesitation. The consensus of opinion was that he was a poet. When Landor hailed him in verse at the time when *English Misrule and Irish Misdeeds* appeared, he addressed the poet, not the critic; Sara Coleridge, when giving her impression of her friend, wrote: "I have lived among poets a great deal, and have known greater poets than he is, but a more entire poet, one more a poet in his whole mind and temperament, I never knew or met with"; Newman's impression was very similar; Henry Taylor reviewed his poetry in 1843 and in 1864; and the French Count De Montalembert expressed his surprise in a letter to De Vere, in 1848, at finding that the poet was also "an excellent prosateur". They were, it is true, early admirers, who had seen little more of his prose than his pamphlet on the Irish Famine, a few letters, and perhaps one or two prefaces in his volumes of poetry; but later friends did not view him in a different light: Tennyson, Patmore, H. Morley, Swinburne, W. Watson, Thompson, they all spoke and wrote of De Vere as a poet, not as a critic. To these may be added the opinions of the writers who in newspapers reviewed one or other of his poetical volumes, e.g. *Alexander* in *The Standard,* and *The Legends of St. Patrick* in *The Pall Mall Gazette* and in *The Saturday Review.* Some days after his death he was commemorated in a few periodicals: Wilfrid Meynell wrote an article in *The Athenaeum,* two appeared in *The Academy,* one written by Francis Thompson, the other was signed 'The Bookworm'; and also some newspapers, like *The Daily Telegraph,* came out with a short obituary notice. But, again, it was the poet they commemorated, not the critic. The only periodical that did justice, though not even-handed justice, to both functions in De Vere was an American one, *The Atlantic Monthly*

(vol. 89), in which Andrew J. George gave to his readers a better impression of Aubrey de Vere as a man of letters than the articles of his English colleagues did.

There was only one man among De Vere's contemporaries who thought De Vere as a critic more valuable than as a poet. That was Richard Holt Hutton. He wrote to his friend: "I do not think that you ought to measure the chance of success of your essays by that of your poetry; though you are a true poet, you are a poet of that quiet and refined kind that, especially writing as you do on religious subjects and in a Catholic sense, you can hardly expect a large public. Poetry to be really popular needs a very considerable volume of force. Yours is all qualitative. But the critical essays of a true poet on poets are always finer than any other critic can write. There is a touch and a feeling in them, which ordinary critics cannot emulate". Hutton's reputation as a keen literary critic has met due recognition from at least some students of Victorian literature. Through his essays on Wordsworth, Shelley, Browning, Clough, Tennyson, and Arnold, we have come to regard him as a competent judge of 19th century poetry, as an authority whose opinion is of great weight, even though in some cases it is opposed to that of all his contemporaries.

We agree with Hutton that De Vere's critical writings have several merits. William H. Hudson tells us in his chapter on the study of criticism [1]) that trustworthiness is one of the primary conditions for true criticism. Of no other critic's work could this essential quality be more characteristic than of De Vere's. In its fullest sense the word is applicable to all the writings of this champion of truth, whose ideal it was to fight falsehood in every form. The very desire to make truth reign supreme in religion, in literature, in politics, and in all things, gave to several of his essays their peculiar polemic character. It is true that, especially in theology and politics, many of De Vere's opinions are founded on convictions, and as such they are to be accepted or rejected; but in all those matters in which true judgment depends on learning, insight, and sincerity, De Vere was eminently trustworthy. There are several writers whose statements on certain points, and whose representation of persons or things, are unreliable, because as critics they did not possess the knowledge necessary to make them good judges, or because their judgment was

[1]) William H. Hudson, *An Introduction to the Study of Literature*, second ed. enlarged, 1919; Harrap, London.

warped by prejudice, vanity, or self-love. What to say of the trustworthiness of such a critic as Henry Taylor, who opened his *Autobiography* with stating his regret that his name was only 'tailor', who flattered himself with the thought that it was he who had made Wordsworth famous, and who had a habit of showing off his knowledge of Italian? We think such a writer unreliable, because he is vain and, consequently, insincere. In this judgment we do not stand alone: Professor Lounsbury, too, mistrusted Taylor's "egregious and unblushing vanity" (Cf. *The Life and Times of Tennyson*, p. 175). What to say of Macaulay, who liked nothing better than to hear himself talk? And who would take Arnold as a guide to subjects of which he treated with hardly any information? De Vere, indeed, sometimes coloured the pictures of his favourite poets too brightly; but enthusiasm and patriotism are venial sins against truthfulness in comparison with self-love, vanity, and insufficient knowledge. He knew what he was writing about when he dealt with religious or political problems; his wide reading and his logic made him a formidable opponent in controversy; in history his memory was rarely at fault, and as regards poetry, he could quote passages from the works of the masters "enough to fill a biggish book", as Wilfrid Meynell said. He showed a particularly keen insight into the characters and the value of his great contemporaries: Carlyle, Macaulay, Newman, Manning, Gladstone; and we think that biographers of these men would do well to pay more attention to De Vere's account of them. But he is hardly less negligible as a critic of Spenser's and Wordsworth's philosophy, for no writer understood these poets so well or showed a truer appreciation of their works than he did. If he was not wholly free from prejudice, it is that he was prejudiced against doctrines, not against the persons who held or advocated them. De Vere never wrote an abusive word of a man, least of all of a poet; his love of poetry and his belief in the sincerity of any one who practised the literary art were too sacred in him to condemn a man and his literary works for his ideas and convictions. Not that De Vere left a writer's faults unnoticed. But he never dwelt long on them and often tried to diminish their salience. He preferred to analyse and call attention to the good qualities of a poet, in accordance with his principle that the edifying power of poetry must be sought in what is best in it.

Another element in De Vere's criticism, which greatly enhances its trustworthiness, is its absolute disinterestedness. Matthew Arnold re-

garded disinterestedness as essential for true criticism. No critic could have been more unselfish in his writings than De Vere. It is true that he tried to defend his own poetry through the works of congenial poets, but not in all his publications did he in a single instance speak of it in a direct manner, and only once did he complain about his unpopularity as a poet. But it was in a letter to Coventry Patmore that he did so, not in his essays: "As for my poetry, indeed, it can never be forgotten, because nothing can be forgotten that was not once remembered, or at least known". Instead, he wrote of the poetry of his friends, of Wordsworth's, of Henry Taylor's, of Tennyson's, of Patmore's, and he praised it, and tried to make it known as widely as possible. Nor was it from any purpose of serving his personal interest that De Vere published, in 1858, *Select Specimens of English Poets,* an anthology which was enlarged and re-edited in 1893 under the title of *The Household Poetry Book: An Anthology of English-speaking Poets from Chaucer to Faber,* with biographical and critical notes that rank among the sanest and most judicious of their kind. His editorial work chiefly proceeded from his pure love for the poetic art and from his zeal to spread what he considered really true poetry among his contemporaries.

This zeal partly explains why, in his essays, he was inclined to brush over the faults in the works of his favourite poets: it did not suit his literary apostolate to call attention to the defects in them. In his literary correspondence, however, he discussed them more freely and there he often pointed out how the edition of an author's poetry could be improved. There, too, he sometimes criticised his own poetry and put to himself, and to others, the question what were its shortcomings. He frankly admitted that some careful weeding would do much good to his many poetical volumes; only, he confessed himself unable to decide what was to be left out, what to be retained, since, in his opinion, all his poems were on the same level. It is the old truth: a good critic of other poets is often a bad critic of his own poetry. De Vere put it beyond all doubt that he was a bad judge of his own work when he wrote to Henry Taylor that he did not think it was deficient in imagination.

De Vere's criticism is valuable in several other respects. We may point to his graceful style, his versatility, his keenness of logic and his method of treating philosophical subjects. But what makes his prose-writings particularly interesting is that in his ideas and in his appreciation he often showed himself to be ahead of his time. He was

the man who had foreseen and predicted Shelley's fame at a time when most of his contemporaries were still adoring Byron; he had, early in his career, estimated Macaulay at his real value, while many people were looking on the brilliant talker as the ninth wonder of the world; he maintained the greatness of Keats and Wordsworth as poets from the beginning and remained faithful to them to the end, while in many literary circles both were regarded with indifference; he was among the first to proclaim Tennyson's genius and he never hesitated to rank Tennyson and Browning highest among contemporary poets. Even before Francis Thompson had published his first volume of poems, De Vere predicted the advent of a poet who would accomplish in poetry what he himself had tried to do; and he lived to see his prophecy fulfilled. Surely, De Vere was a better prophet than Arnold, who thought that Byron would still be admired in the twentieth century, by the side of Wordsworth.

As a political seer De Vere was less successful; but on the subjects of poetry, religion, ethics, and culture, his ideas rarely proved unpractical, and, especially when dealing with poetry, he sometimes anticipated views held at a later date. Scattered over the essays on *Landor,* on *The two chief Schools in Poetry,* and on *Literature in its social Aspects,* lies much of the substance of Theodore Watts-Dunton's brilliant essay on *The Renascence of Wonder in Poetry,* which was prefixed to the third volume of *Chambers's Cyclopaedia of English Literature.* Nor are De Vere's controversial essays quite dead yet. We agree with Wenham that the apologetical writings have lost little of their force and that they will always remain useful for those who try to find their way to truth. Of course most of these writings have been superseded now by more scientific and more detailed studies; De Vere was one of the earliest defenders of the doctrines and the claims of the Catholic Church in the 19th century, a layman, who wrote chiefly for his contemporaries. But he was not an amateur, not a dilettante in apologetics; and it appears that some of his ideas on questions, such as the claims of Modern Science, education for Catholics, the Church and the State, and the rights of the Lower Classes, although they were formed in the heat of the battle, would not be out of place in such a recent work as Hilaire Belloc's *Essays of a Catholic* (1933).

Learning, trustworthiness, and sympathetic appreciation made De Vere a critic whose judgment was held in high esteem by his friends. After Wenham's tribute paid to the apologist, Hutton's estimate is

perhaps the most generous recognition of the essayist, that is to say, in words. But there were others who showed by their deeds that they, too, recognised De Vere's power as a literary critic. We mentioned already that Dr. Grosart invited him to write an essay on Spenser, that the Wordsworth Society invited him to lecture on the poetry of his favourite master, that Patmore altered his 'Sentences' on De Vere's advice; and there are more instances of such recognition. Wordsworth, surely not one to be easily influenced on the subject of poetry, had intended to alter one of his odes (probably the one beginning with: "Who rises on the banks of Seine?") in order to get rid of a charge of paganism; De Vere objected to the innovation and finally obtained Wordsworth's promise to give it up. Alice Meynell sent her poems in manuscript to him and wrote to him: "Many things that you said at Lady Georgiana Fullerton's have opened my eyes to my own ignorance and to the errors of taste and judgment which mar my work" (Cf. *Alice Meynell,* by Viola Meynell; London, 1929). He assisted Andrew J. George in preparing an edition of Wordsworth's *Prelude,* which edition was dedicated to himself, and his contributions to Memoirs of his friends were valued by the biographers of Tennyson, Lord Houghton, and Sara Coleridge. And not the least evidence of appreciation was given by Newman when, in 1856, he appointed De Vere lecturer in Political and Social Science at the Catholic University.

We do not believe in the use of the practice commonly indulged in by reviewers of an author's works to decide at the end of their survey in which of the two functions he is to be considered most successful. One grows a little sceptical about the value of such a statement as Professor Hugh Walker's, in *The Age of Tennyson* (p. 23), that "generally, as in the case of Scott, there is no difficulty in subordinating the one (function) to the other", after finding that critics of an author's works frequently take opposite views. Professor Walker owned that "in Arnold's case there is a difficulty", an opinion which was shared by H. D. Traill — the well known contributor to *The Nineteenth Century,* and afterwards editor of The Times Weekly, *Literature* — who wrote in his spirited essay on Arnold, in his volume *The New Fiction:* "It is impossible in considering the poet to forget the critic with whom we more or less enthusiastically agree or disagree"; Professor Oliver Elton expressed a similar opinion in his work, *A Survey of English Literature,* 1830-1880 (vol. 1, p. 254). But what

about the many critics who did decide either in favour of Arnold the poet, or of Arnold the prose-writer? In T. H. Wright's work on *Francis Thompson and his Poetry* we read, on p. 23, that Thompson "produced much golden prose, which some declare to be finer than his verse", which implies that there were others who preferred the poet to the critic. Similar examples of difference in taste might be adduced from criticisms on Swinburne, Rossetti, Patmore, Shelley, and several others. We confess that, even in the case of Walter Scott, we are not quite sure whether the learned critic meant the prose or the poetry as being subordinate to the other. It is all a matter of preference.

In a former chapter we observed that there is a relation between the verse and the prose of an author, the relation, namely, that the one is the expression of his individuality as well as the other — provided, of course, that both are about equal in quantity — and common sense tells us that what an author is as a poet, he must be as a critic. Therefore we hold that, apart from the relative value of poetry and criticism as forms of literature, the two functions in Aubrey de Vere as a man of letters are of equal rank. This is not an attempt to avoid committing ourselves or to strike a compromise between opinions such as Meynell's and Thompson's on the one hand and Hutton's on the other; it is rather a challenge to all those who think that the qualities of De Vere as a poet are different from his qualities as a critic. We are firmly convinced that he must be judged as a whole, just as his writings are one whole. Admirers of his poetry may defend their preference by praising the spirit in which the poems were written and by pointing to half a dozen odes, sonnets, and songs, produced in moments of inspiration; to this we answer that the spirit of De Vere's essays is exactly the same and that as a prose-writer he had his flashes also, of which that stroke of genius, *The Human Affections*, is not the least remarkable. In both cases his merits and demerits were of the same order.

De Vere has been judged by the world. He was weighed as an artist and found wanting when the highest test was applied to his works. The world was right in its judgment: he fell short in creative imagination and in originality, the two elements which alone could have made him immortal. Sometimes, in his best poems and his best essays the powers of creative imagination seemed to awaken in him, but on closer inspection his creations do not appear to be in the fullest

sense original; and in those things in which he was original, notably in his attempt to introduce the spirit of ancient Christianity into the literature of his time, he failed in imagination. But all his judges, save those few who saw him depart with many doubts in their hearts and with a feeling of regret, were wrong in sending him away to oblivion. They were wrong in not caring for his aims, for his beautiful character, for his conception of the poetic art and of the function of criticism, and for his lesser merits. Above all, they were wrong in condemning his works for their lack of sensual beauty. Not that De Vere's poetry, or his criticism, had much of it; but his writings were marked by a different kind, namely, spiritual beauty. In his own eyes this kind of beauty was more important than the other, and there are many people who take the same view. Indeed, if De Vere had seen his way to offer to the world spiritual beauty unalloyed and duly proportioned, he might still have been reckoned among the great men of letters. But he spoilt his chance to a very high place in literature by mixing up his conception of beauty with too much didacticism and by paying too little heed to artistic ends. This mistake made him become prolix in poetry and it made him superficial as a critic. It made him one-sided as a man of letters.

Yet, notwithstanding these blemishes, De Vere's works have not lost their charm and value. As a man of letters he stands or falls with the cause he fought for, the cause of the Christian Faith. Therefore he must needs be the poet of the few. But, even when viewed apart from his cause and purely from the standpoint of literature, he does not deserve the neglect to which his judges assigned him; he has a claim to recognition, not perhaps as a popular writer, but as a good, instructive, and valuable author. To lovers of poetry he may bring joy and strength through the thoughtfulness and the lofty nobleness of his poems; to the sympathetic reader of his apologetical essays he may bring light and happiness; and the student of his literary essays may gain from them a deeper insight and a fuller appreciation, especially of Christian poets. It should be remembered that as a poet he cannot be ignored in a study of the rise of Irish literature, although he is not, as Professor W. Macneile Dixon says [2], an Irish poet; that he must be given a prominent place in a study of the Victorian drama; and that he is first among the Wordsworth-

[2] *A Treasury of Irish Poetry in the English Tongue*, ed. by Stopford A. Brooke and T. W. Rolleston; London, Smith, Elder & Co, 1900; with an introductory notice by Prof. W. Macneile Dixon. (pp. 311-314).

ians. As a critic his value is equally beyond doubt; his interpretation of poetry and of poets is marked by breadth and clear-sightedness, and no work on academic criticism in the 19th century could really boast completeness and thoroughness in which he is omitted or only glanced at. And yet, this has been De Vere's fate in many instances. He is not mentioned in such works as G. K. Chesterton's *Victorian Age in Literature* (1913), P. Braybrooke's *Some Victorian and Georgian Catholics* (1932), Allardyce Nicoll's *British Drama* (1925), Henry Tristram's *Newman and his Friends* (1933), and D. W. Rannie's *Wordsworth and his Circle* (1907); nor is De Vere's place conspicuous in Kegan Paul's *Memories,* in Bern. Holland's *Memoir of Kenelm Digby,* and in J. E. Bowden's *Life and Letters of William Faber;* — works in which Aubrey de Vere as a man of letters or as a friend ought to have been named.

De Vere's writings cannot be analysed. The attractiveness of his work is not shown by detailing his abilities as a man of letters. To enumerate his specific merits as a poet and as a critic would make him seem greater than he is, and, what is more, the real beauty of his work would be missed; for it is not in his poetical temper or in his critical power that it must be sought, neither will it be found in only a few of his poems or essays. It is embodied in his whole work and it was first of all his beautiful character that imparted it. The peculiar charm of De Vere's writings is not that of beauty created, but that of beauty given, the beauty of sweetness, of unselfishness, of fidelity, and of saintliness, given from his heart. For this charm, this beauty, his work should be more widely known than it is. All the readers of De Vere have felt the beauty inherent in his work; and it is not only for its own poetical qualities that we conclude with the following poem, copied from *The Fortnightly Review* (January, 1902) and written by one of De Vere's friends, but also because it gives a true impression of De Vere's beautiful, St. Francis-like character: —

AUBREY DE VERE

(Born, January 10, 1814; Died, January 20, 1902)

In the far romantic morning where the giant bards together,
Ringed with dew and light and music, struck their lyres in golden weather,
Came a child and stood beside them, gazed adorning in their eyes,
Hushed his little heart in worship of a race so bland and wise.

They are gone, those gods and giants, caught Elijah-like to glory,
And their triumphs and their sorrows are a part of England's story;
Years and years ago they vanished; but the child, who loved them well,
Still has wandered among mortals with a tale of them to tell.

Theirs were voices heard like harps above the congregated thunder;
His, a trembling hymn to beauty, or a breath of whispered wonder;
When the world's tongue spoke, his vanished; but below the turmoil rolled
Fragments of romantic rapture, echoes of the age of gold.

Others stun the years to homage with their novelty and splendour;
He was shy and backward-gazing, but his noiseless soul was tender.
When he sang the birds sang louder, for his accents, low and clear,
Never hushed a mourning cushat, never scared a sunning deer.

Now the last of all who communed with the mighty men has perished;
He is part of that eternity which he prophesied and cherished;
Now the child, the whisperer passes; now extremity of age
Shuts the pure memorial volume, turns the long and stainless page.

Where some westward-hurrying river to the bright Atlantic dashes,
In some faint enchanted Celtic woodland lay this poet's ashes,
That the souls of those old masters whom the clans of song hold dear,
May return to hover nightly o'er the grave of their De Vere.

Edmund Gosse.

The end.

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INDEX

STELLINGEN

1.

Het karakter van Aubrey de Vere's literaire werk typeert hem als een echt Victoriaan.

2.

Ierland zal nooit tot bloei komen zoolang Noord-Ierland niet bij Eire gevoegd is.

3.

Voor de vreeselijke gevolgen van den Grooten Ierschen Hongersnood moet op de eerste plaats de toenmalige Engelsche regeering verantwoordelijk gesteld worden.

4.

Er zijn geen dichters in den Victoriaanschen tijd die „Mystici" genoemd kunnen worden.

5.

Voor practisch gebruik hebben de termen ‚Classiek' en ‚Romantisch', ‚Classicisme' en ‚Romanticisme', in de Engelsche letterkunde hun beteekenis verloren.

6.

Het proza en de poëzie van het Victoriaansche tijdperk worden door een sterk critischen geest gekenmerkt.

7.

Wordsworth's theorie over de ‚Function of Poetry' en ‚Poetic Diction' bracht een groote verandering teweeg in het karakter van het Sonnet en de Ode.

8.

Harold Nicolson is er niet in geslaagd in zijn werk *Tennyson* (1923) duidelijk te maken waarin de „zending" bestond, die Tennyson naar zijn meening te vervullen had.

9.

De benaming *Natural Religion* is ongeschikt om de betrekking uit te drukken tusschen Wordsworth's geestesleven en de Natuur.

10.

Den overgang van den synthetischen naar den analytischen zinsbouw, welke de Germaansche taalgeschiedenis typeert, kan men o.a. ook reeds in het Oud-Saksisch gedicht *Heliand* waarnemen.

11.

In de graphische voorstellingen van de Engelsche klinkerposities verdient het ‚vierkant' van Sweet en Bell de voorkeur boven den ‚driehoek' van Walter Ripman.

12.

De Engelsche Explosiva zijn niet, zooals Daniel Jones beweert in de 3e editie van zijn *Outline of English Phonetics* (1933), geaspireerd.

13.

Phonetisch schrift heeft voor leerlingen die met Engelsch beginnen groote bezwaren.

14.

De Progressieve Vorm in het Engelsch drukt als regel een tijdstip uit, niet een tijdsduur, zooals E. Kruizinga het wil doen voorkomen in *Handbook of Present-Day English*, Accidence and Syntax, vol. 1, § 500. (5e editie).

15.

Het is verkeerd, zooals de meeste Engelsche grammatica's doen, ‚Some' tot de *Definite Pronouns* te rekenen, en ‚Any' tot de *Indefinite Pronouns*; het moet andersom zijn.